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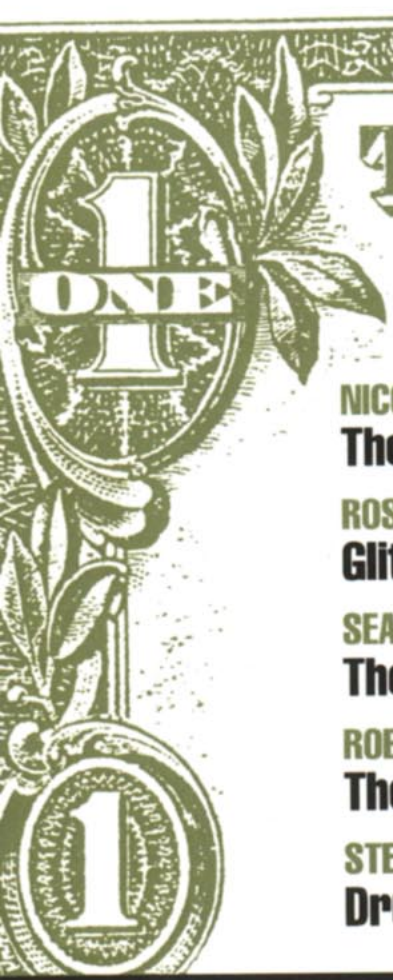

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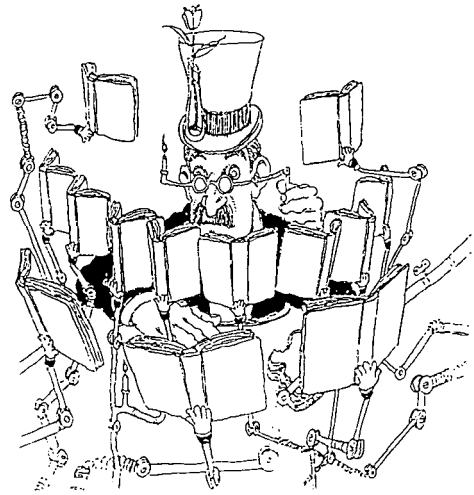

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Abraham Brumberg

AN IMMENSITY OF CHANGE

Perestroika, Poland, Politics in Eastern Europe

The following dialogue between Abraham Brumberg and Irving Howe took place in early October 1989. Abraham Brumberg is a widely published authority on Soviet and Eastern European affairs and editor of the forthcoming Perestroika: Chronicle of a Revolution, *published by Pantheon Books—Eds.*

IH: Some questions about the fate of perestroika: There is a general sense that, although the achievements of *glasnost* are remarkable, *perestroika* as a socioeconomic transformation is facing grave difficulties. Boris Yeltsin recently said that he gives Gorbachev a year. If there are no significant improvements, there could follow serious dislocations. I notice also among some commentators a kind of anticipatory glee at the difficulties of *perestroika*, as if the confirmation of conservative ideology is more important than the success of Gorbachev's effort. Within the Bush administration there clearly are influential people who feel nostalgic for the days of cold war and are not especially eager for *perestroika* to succeed. So I raise these questions: What in general is the situation today with regard to *perestroika*? Do you agree that a coup against Gorbachev would, right now, be a disaster for the entire world, since it might restart the cold war and impose a new authoritarianism on the Russian people?

AB: Yes, the achievements of *glasnost* surpass those of *perestroika*. But let's keep things in proportion. First, the two are interrelated—you can't have restructuring without the right to expose all the evils of the system, past and present, and to advocate alternatives. In turn, the overhauling of basic institutions encourages more free discussion and criticism. To separate one from the other strikes me as an academic exercise.

Second, what do we mean by *perestroika*? The word refers not only to economic transformations. The Soviet economy, of course, is in terrible shape, what with most of the old structures still intact, the new ones weak, incomplete, lacking in legal guarantees, and unable to function properly. Add to this the rapidly dwindling supply of basic food and consumer goods, rising expectations, and a frightful inflation, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Not only Boris Yeltsin, but serious economists like Leonid Abalkin and Nikolai Shmelev say that unless there is significant improvement within a year, the whole program of *glasnost* and *perestroika* may be put in jeopardy. This means massive strikes and food riots and a social climate receptive to demands for "discipline, law and order." The Ligachevs and others like him, though now removed from power, as well as chauvinist and anti-Semitic organizations like Pamyat, openly looking for scapegoats—Jews, liberals, "Westerners," and the like—are waiting for this to happen. The nostalgia for a "strong hand" should not be underestimated.

Why is the situation so grave? I already mentioned a few reasons, but here is one more: Gorbachev's mistakes and miscalculations. Would any other leader have fared any better? I doubt it. Given the crisis he inherited in every area of Soviet life, from the economy to public health, from political corruption to social apathy, his overall record has been extraordinarily impressive. I will come to some of his real achievements in a moment, but it is also true that he has been dragging his feet on fundamental economic reforms and that his handling of the nationalities problem has left much to be desired. This may have been caused by shortsightedness, or by the fact that his intended reforms have run into a solid wall of opposition from the entrenched bureaucracy, or both; but the fact remains that more decisive measures might have had salutary effects.

To say this is not to wring one's hands in despair. Gorbachev is a consummate politician, still possessed of enormous appeal, a man who has shown repeatedly that he is not loath to admit his errors and

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to learn from experience. I think he is capable of turning the situation around in the near future, however bad it is now, and however much his image has suffered in the eyes of many Russians, including the increasingly radicalized liberal intelligentsia.

Now about his achievements. Economic restructuring has thus far not been, to put it mildly, a huge success. But in other areas the achievements have been quite remarkable. I am referring to the growth of a real parliamentary system. The Supreme Soviet has already proved that it is far more sensitive to its constituents (the very term "constituents" is here mind-boggling, isn't it?) than to party *diktat*. It has refused to approve numerous ministerial appointments, it has forced Gorbachev to retreat from his plan of imposing a general moratorium on strikes, it has enacted important judicial reforms (for instance, by enshrining the principle of presumption of innocence), it is rewriting the Constitution as well as the electoral law, which has come in for a great deal of criticism. These are enormous achievements.

IH: And the attitudes in the West?

AB: I think John le Carré, in his piece in the *New York Times,* (September 29, 1989) offers a brilliant commentary on the kind of *Schadenfreude* displayed by some of our, God help us, political leaders. But it's not only Kissinger's friend Lawrence Eagleburger or Bush's Secretary of Defense Cheney who don't want to believe that *perestroika* is "for real," and who hanker for the good old days of the "evil empire." You will find the same attitude among some Sovietologists. Professor Richard Pipes, in a *New York Times* op-ed article under the characteristic title, "The Russians Are Still Coming" (October 9, 1989) blithely asserts that Soviet changes in foreign policy are phony, that their "less aggressive" statements are designed to fool the West and to obtain foreign loans, and that —I quote—"in fact, the soft-line policy has enabled Moscow to spread its influence and power abroad more effectively than when it had pursued an overtly hard line." You can't win, can you? Pipes is not living in the past—he is trapped in his own obsessions.

IH: An especially troublesome problem in the Soviet Union is the nationalities question. Obviously, socialists believe in the right of national self-determination; but right now, an excessively impetuous drive for independence among the various nationalities that make up the Soviet Union might lead to violent conflicts and an extreme reaction from the Moscow authorities. Is it impossible to find viable compromises on this matter?

AB: I think that economic successes—or at least a perceptible trend toward the better—will also help to defuse the nationalities problem, much of which is rooted in justifiable economic and ecological grievances. In the end, nothing short of a federation with genuine political, cultural, and economic autonomy for the republics will resolve it. Some republics, especially the Baltic ones, may even secede from the Union. But this cannot take place overnight. Gorbachev is not about to send tanks to Vilnius or Tallin—this would be the end of him and his policies. But neither must he be provoked by maximalist demands. Armchair advice? To be sure. I am convinced, however, from talks I have had with Baltic representatives, that they are ready to be both firm and flexible—firm in their ultimate goals, flexible in their tactics. By the same token, Gorbachev may talk tough, may condemn "irresponsible talk about secession," but the logic of his policies points toward a genuine multinational state.

Don't forget that the situation varies from republic to republic. In the case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which I think Gorbachev could have avoided by drastic action over a year ago, the Russians find themselves in a position similar to Great Britain's in Northern Ireland. In the case of the Ukraine, you have a population of over fifty million people, ten million of them Russians, and half of the Ukrainian population quite thoroughly Russified. The cry for a "free independent Ukraine," therefore, makes little sense. All in all, as the Viennese would say, the situation is serious, but not necessarily hopeless. Above all, it is a situation without precedents—and therefore without any models on which to base confident predictions. The Western governments should certainly lend Gorbachev a hand, and all that the rest of us can do is hope for the best. At any rate, I do.

We Turn to Poland

IH: All the Eastern European countries are, of course, different from one another, but Poland seems, so to say, "more different." Could you say why the situation in Poland has moved in such a remarkable and largely unforeseen direction?

AB: Poland has always been something of a maverick in the "socialist bloc." In prewar Poland, the Communist party enjoyed virtually no social support. At its height it numbered about ten thousand members. It had hardly any adherents among the peasants, it controlled only a few trade unions, and the bulk of the left-wing intelligentsia was far more sympathetic to the Polish Socialist party (PPS) than to the CP.

Two other factors must also be kept in mind: First, the party was slavishly loyal to Moscow (for

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which the latter reciprocated, in its usual fashion, by excommunicating the Polish CP in 1938 and arresting those of its leaders who were in Russia at that time). Second, about half of the party's members came from disaffected minorities, such as the Jews, the Ukrainians, and the Belorussians, and the last two had their own—albeit small—communist parties. (Don't forget that about one-third of Poland's prewar population was non-Polish, almost all of whom had been subject to persecution in one form or another.) All of which combined to endow the party with an "anti-Polish" odium. In time, the Communists themselves also turned against the Jews, but the shift did nothing to enhance the party's credibility in the eyes of a fiercely anti-Russian and largely anti-Semitic population.

It was the party's weakness, during the entire postwar period, which explains why on the one hand it made so many concessions, earning the reputation as the most "liberal" regime in the bloc, and why on the other it was fearful of promoting serious reforms, especially in the economic area. Any loosening of a centralized command economy must lead to political reforms, and this was something that the party apparat could not tolerate. I am convinced it was the fear of losing control rather than the threat of an outright Soviet invasion that forced Jaruzelski's hand in December 1981. During the martial law period, Jaruzelski was far more preoccupied with eliminating every vestige of autonomous activity than with the country's economy, which was clearly heading towards catastrophe.

The demise of the one-party state in 1989 was a direct result of the elite's insecurity, the gradual erosion of its legitimacy, of political paralysis, and of rising popular anger—all this plus, of course, the eclipse of the "Brezhnev doctrine." Under Gorbachev, the old argument that "we can't do it because Moscow won't let us" could no longer work.

IH: What then are the prospects for a social democratic revival in Poland? Or are there any?

AB: The left in Poland—what's left of it—is in disarray. In the eyes of many Poles, everything connected with "socialism" is anathema, while "capitalism" is taken to mean instant prosperity and freedom. Look, for instance, at the popularity of Whiz Kid Harvard professor Jeffrey Sachs who has been telling the Poles that if they act swiftly and decisively, put an end to all subsidies, turn the factories over to private owners, close all unprofitable enterprises, eliminate all price controls and, believe it or not, refuse to pay its 40 billion dollar debt—that is, in his words, if the Poles take a "giant leap into a full market economy," all their problems will be solved, without any suffering and hardships.

I am not saying, of course, that all Poles have bought this rubbish, but many of them, including the incurably romantic Adam Michnik, are lapping it up. Quite apart from its flagrant appeal to the coarsest sort of economic egoism and its contempt for fundamental social values, this kind of advice is simply preposterous on pragmatic grounds. Sachs claims that he single-handedly solved the staggering inflation in Bolivia, conveniently forgetting that this entailed martial law, closing down trade unions, deportation of hundreds of labor leaders, and mass unemployment.

To their credit, many serious Poles, including prominent economists, will have none of this. In one of his typically slick appearances on Polish television, Sachs said that if you are going to cut the tail of a cat, it's better to do it in one fell swoop, rather than in pieces. This led one journalist, Daniel Passent, to observe that Sachs must have a peculiar breed of cats in mind—quite unlike the Polish kind, which don't like to have their tails cut off either piecemeal or at once, especially if the "cutting starts right below the neck."

It remains to be seen to what extent the new government, which is generally quite conservative, will follow Sachs's advice. If it does, it may well be out of power in a few months, since it will then provoke enormous popular dissatisfaction.

IH: Let's stop here for a minute because you are touching on one of the things that I want to ask you. And that is the phrase that one hears from and about Poland, a phrase without, I think, any very clear, specific content: "a free market."

AB: Walesa uses it as, more or less, a euphemism for capitalism.

IH: Yes, Walesa uses it. Apparently among some of the Polish intellectuals the idea of Thatcherism has become very popular. I can understand that if you lived under a Stalinist command economy that has dragged the country down into a kind of hell, Thatcherism should, by contrast, seem attractive. I suspect that if they were really ready to turn to laissez-faire capitalism they would discover its disadvantages, to put it mildly. But I have a suspicion that the phrase "free market" is often used without any specific content and that it is one of those umbrella phrases that allows people of very different views to use the same terminology, that is, people who really want the restoration of unadulterated capitalism and those who feel that in the Polish situation this is a utopian idea. Who would want to buy some of those obsolete factories? The sensible

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solution would seem to be to move to some version of a mixed economy. . . .

AB: Correct.

IH: With some state ownership, some cooperative ownership, some individual, private ownership—and the individual, private ownership probably in the smaller industries and light industries in the small enterprises, and so on.

AB: The word "socialism," the system in Poland that they perceive to be socialism, has become discredited. Ergo, up with capitalism—from one extreme to the other.

IH: Even though the irony is that it has been precisely the socialists, the western socialists, anyway, and the Polish and Russian socialists, too, who over the decades have made the criticisms of the Stalinist economic regime that now are being vindicated.

AB: That is one of the ironies of history. Do the masses of Poles know about it, do they read what socialist critics of Stalinism have been saying for decades? Of course not. They are infatuated with the idea that capitalism is going to bring them salvation. Not all the economists in Poland think in those terms, but there are many politicians, including quite a few on the Solidarity side, who do. So there is a great danger of embracing capitalism and the free-market economy uncritically.

The danger comes not only from the economic "liberals," as they are known in Poland, but also from the traditional political right. The church, under Primate Glemp, is keen on proceeding with its usual agendas—ban on divorce, penalties for women undergoing abortions (but not for men who made them pregnant), removing "atheism" from school premises, and so on. Glemp's profoundly anti-Semitic homily last autumn was no surprise: Glemp is a self-declared admirer of Roman Dmowski, head of the prewar, virulently nationalistic and anti-Semitic National Democrats, or Endeks, and he has come out openly for the creation of a "Christian Democratic" party that would carry on the traditions of that movement.

When the prominent Polish-Jewish writer Dawid Warszawski (the penname of Konstanty Gebert) wrote a scathing criticism of Glemp, the editors of *Solidarity Weekly*, to their everlasting shame, refused to accept it, arguing that it would antagonize their readers. Gebert was then forced to publish his piece in the weekly *Polityka*, nominally a party paper, but increasingly now a spokesman of what might be called the genuine left. (Incidentally, the Nov. Dec. 1989 issue of *Tikkun* carries Gebert's long article on this subject.)

I might add that the appointment of Alexander Hall, a "neo-Endek" as Minister Without Portfolio in charge of political parties, is also a sign of which way the wind is blowing. Hall says that he is for the National Democratic tradition cleansed of its unpleasant aspects, such as anti-Semitism, which was understandable before the war, but whose resurgence "would not be in the Polish interest." Which is rather like proclaiming one's faith in Catholicism without the Holy Trinity, but including the Inquisition. If this comparison strikes you as outlandish, let me point out that Hall believes that the "nation" is the highest social value, that a Pole is defined by his Catholicism, and that Poland must protect itself from Western "materialism," "atheism," "pragmatism," and other isms that threaten to sap its "national identity and energy."

IH: I would think that the West European social democrats—if they have any political imagination at all—would see here a tremendous opportunity to intervene in the discussion now raging in Poland and other east European countries—to intervene in a friendly and helpful way.

AB: Some, if not enough of them, have. When President Mitterand of France was in Poland several months ago and lectured in Cracow, he told his Polish audience something to this effect: "You are understandably disenchanted with the Stalinist type of 'socialism,' which I do not consider socialism at all, but that does not mean that socialism, the kind for which I speak, has been discredited." Distinctions have to be made, and there are people willing to listen, who look, say, to Sweden as a possible model rather than to Thatcherite England. But so far, I'm afraid, the voice of Western social democracy has not been strong enough.

IH: So we are still, though in a new way, paying for Stalinism.

AB: Yes, certainly. Let me stress that I am not arguing that Poland is now in danger of turning right-wing and nationalistic. I am merely pointing to the forces that push it in that direction.

By and large the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki—himself a distinguished liberal Catholic without a single blemish on his record—is indeed conservative, but not reactionary. There are many people in Solidarity who remain loyal to the basic principles of the left—social justice, separation of church and state, social organization, human solidarity, and so on.

With help from abroad, they may shed their reluctance to assert these beliefs for fear of "antagonizing" the public or the church. Especially when it becomes clear that the road advocated by the

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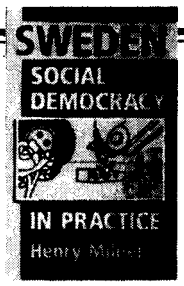
reactionaries and "liberals" points to disaster, and that the average Pole, whatever his aversion to "socialism" (as he or she understands it), is not willing to give up full employment, free education, free health care, the absence of gross social inequality, and the notion that the state must play an active role in promoting and safeguarding these gains, however they may have been traduced in actual practice. I know quite a few people in Poland who still believe in these principles.

IH: And what about the Polish Communists?

AB: As Communists, they're as dead as a doornail. The Hungarian CP, as you know, having realized that the word "communist" has become a term of abuse, recently reconstituted itself as the "Hungarian Socialist party." Having renounced doctrinaire Marxism and much of its own political legacy, the Hungarian party may yet succeed in turning to a new path. It has a strong and genuine reformist wing bent on purging the party of its unreconstructed hard liners and on pursuing moderate socialist policies. The Polish CP, too, has had its reformers or liberals, but they command little if any respect.

IH: Is the Polish CP, therefore, doomed to oblivion?

AB: The party will no doubt split, and the reformists will take a leaf from the Hungarians. If social discontent grows, if Solidarity's credibility as a political party and as a trade union movement—after all, the two are in serious conflict—collapses, then a new political movement comprising the Communist reformers and possibly leaders of the new trade unions may come into being. It would be, in effect, a party of protest. But I don't think this is likely to happen in the very near future.



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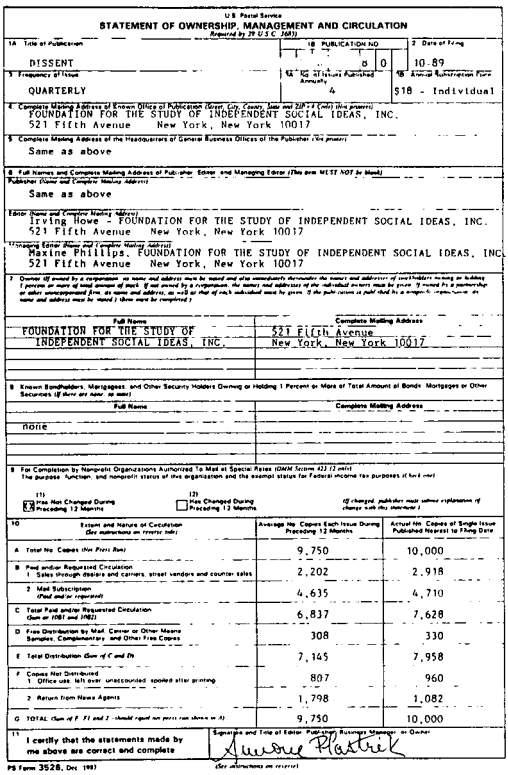

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November 15, 1989: Tremendous events have taken place in Eastern Europe since this discussion was taped. A quarterly just can't keep up—but we try. The Berlin Wall has fallen; East Germany has been swept by enormous popular demonstrations against the Communist dictatorship; the main opposition group, *Neue Forum*, has been growing rapidly. In Bulgaria the old Stalinist hack Zhikov has been removed; and in Czechoslovakia there is now an enormous popular uprising.

We are witnessing a great, historic occasion: the collapse of Stalinism as a politics and, in certain countries, as a power. For socialists, democrats, liberals, this can only be an occasion for rejoicing. As to what will come next—that remains a question to be decided by the people of these countries themselves.—I.H. □

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Ethan Goffman

The Income Gap and Its Causes

Income inequality in the United States is growing with alarming speed. The biggest beneficiaries of this trend are those who least need it, the super-rich, while the most severe victims are those who can least afford it, children. As Leonard Silk reports in the *New York Times* (May 12, 1989), the 1987 total compensation "for the average chief executive of a big company was 93 times the average pay of a factory worker," compared to 41 times in 1960. The upper 20 percent of family incomes in 1987 stood at 43.7 percent of national income, while the lowest 20 percent took in only 4.6 percent, down from 5.5 percent in 1973. The very richest Americans were rewarded even more generously. The average total compensation for the chief executive of a large company was over $2 million, while top salaries stood at $40 or 50 million (what can anyone *do* with all that money?).

Timothy Smeedling of Vanderbilt University gives two main reasons for the increase in poverty despite a rising GNP. First, the government's level of financial support for poor families *does* matter. Canada, which spends 1.6 percent of its GNP on income support for children, doesn't have the kind of poverty found in the United States, which spends only .6 percent of GNP on such programs. Second, the increasing divorce rate, combined with shrinking unemployment and other benefits, hurts the neediest families most.

It is the youngest in these families who suffer most: poverty among children stands at 20.6 percent compared to 17.6 percent in 1966. Children, of course, are unable to speak up for themselves or to lobby politicians. And the impoverished families struggling to raise these children also lack a political voice. By contrast, senior citizens, by forming powerful lobbying organizations, have seen their poverty rate sliced in half in the last decade.

Rising income inequality, though, has an even more profound cause than those cited above, according to Robert Reich writing in the *New Republic* (May 1, 1989). The world economy is increasingly international and mobile. Large companies feel no loyalty to a single country; rather, "a company with headquarters in the United States, production facilities in Taiwan, and a marketing force spread out across many nations competes with a similarly ecumenical company." With record speed, a company can relocate a plant from a country with high wages or labor problems to one where desperate people are only too willing to accept a job at any wage. Big business now controls the ultimate union-busting tool.

Reich divides the workforce into "symbolic analysis" people, whose work involves thinking, planning, and creativity, and routine production and personal service employment, involving unthinking repetition of a few basic actions. In the new economy, "symbolic analysis" workers find themselves in great demand—a top-flight management consultant can auction his (or, much more rarely, her) skills to the highest bidder among a variety of countries and companies.

On paper this puts the United States, with its university system, in a more than comfortable position. Yet this advantage holds only to those who can afford these universities. For the growing underclass, prospects for the future are bleak.

A wall is forming between the richest and poorest Americans. The barrier stems from social, cultural and racial factors but, most of all, from economic and educational status. Reich argues that "as our economic fates diverge, the top fifth may be losing the sense of connectedness with the bottom fifth." Our decision-making classes have more in common with their peers abroad than with other Americans. Separated from the majority, able to whisk around the world electronically on satellite waves or physically on jet planes, they work together to maintain their status.

Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards,* written in 1929, envisions a world where one huge corporation dominates society, in which all citizens are employed by that corporation, which takes care of its workers, bringing about a Utopia. By contrast, the internationalization of corporations now seems more likely to bring about the world portrayed in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis,* where the privileged few enjoy luxuries provided by a population toiling underground who never see the sun. □

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A Special Section

CULTURE IN AN AGE OF MONEY

Edited by Nicolaus Mills

Dissent thanks Lee Edwards and the New York State Council on the Arts for their support of this special section.

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Guests arrive at the $1500-a-plate Bush inaugural dinner at Union Station in Washington, D.C. while a soup kitchen functions a few hundred feet away.

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Nicolaus Mills

CULTURE IN AN AGE OF MONEY

The Legacy of the 1980s

In early 1981, as the Reagan administration was getting under way, its first cultural controversy began. Nancy Reagan wanted new china for the White House. The cost of the china was the problem. The Lenox pattern with a raised gold presidential seal in the center that the president's wife chose came to $209,508 for 220–place settings. At a time when her husband was talking about cutting welfare eligibility and the misery index (inflation plus unemployment) was over 20 percent, Nancy Reagan's desire for new china seemed like an idea borrowed from Marie Antoinette.

Democrats rubbed their hands in glee. What they failed to understand was that a new era was starting. American culture in the 1980s would be a culture based on triumph—on the admiration of power and status—and nothing would be more important to that culture than its symbols. Especially at the start, they were what allowed the president to insist, "We have every right to dream heroic dreams."

The America that the Reagan administration inherited was an America still in shock from a decade of humiliation. The country had lost the longest war in its history. A president had resigned in disgrace. The economy was in shambles. Only a quarter of the voting age population felt the government could be trusted to do what was right most of the time. New White House china would not erase these past humiliations, but like the president's pledge "to make America proud again," new china would be a start in the right direction. During his final year in office, Jimmy Carter had talked about the country's "malaise." But for the Reagans, triumph would be the watchword. "The cynics were wrong. America never was a sick society," Ronald Reagan declared. In the 1980s his America would not look or act like a weakling nation. The president and his guests would eat off china that proclaimed, "The era of self-doubt is over." The demeaning humility of a Jimmy Carter, who allowed Iran to hold Americans hostage for 444 days and insisted he liked peanut butter sandwiches, was past.

Two decades earlier, John Kennedy had made social commitment seem glamorous, and what followed was a counterculture in which civil rights, the antiwar movement, and Woodstock all had their place. Ronald Reagan's version of Camelot was Disneyland, and what followed was a culture in which the "magic of the marketplace" replaced the Magic Kingdom. Yuppie, upscale, privatization: these were the key words for the 1980s, and they signaled a culture with an insatiable need to proclaim its triumphs. Even the act of charging (thanks to the $300 American Express platinum card) became a way of asserting status.

Businesses no longer just bought up other businesses. The 1980s became the decade in which the hostile takeover was made possible by the leveraged buyout and the junk bond, when greenmail was paid to avoid a takeover, when companies were attacked by raiders and saved by white knights, and fired executives floated into retirement on golden parachutes. Only a cynic or the special interests (a labor union, the civil rights movement) would oppose such a culture. As Secretary of Education William Bennett bragged to the Heritage Foundation in a 1986 address, "American conservatism now sets the terms of our debate. It does so because, without in the least abandoning its principles, it has succeeded in

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identifying itself with the quintessential American appetite for new challenges and new opportunities."

In foreign policy the most dramatic indication of the new culture of triumph was reflected in the revival of an imperial America committed to showing its power. Between 1980 and 1987 the military budget more than doubled, climbing to $282 billion annually. But the real change was in the country's inner psychology, its abandonment of what Ronald Reagan called our "Vietnam syndrome." The Grenada invasion of 1983 would show how serious the President was when he insisted Vietnam "was, in truth, a noble cause." The invasion would come less than seventy-two hours after Lebanese terrorists killed 241 Marines in their Beirut barracks, and it would refocus attention on a part of the world that had been an American sore spot ever since the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979.

The fighting itself was over in days. The casualties were light: nineteen killed, 115 wounded. The army would, nonetheless, give out 8,612 medals, and for the country there would be an enormous release of tension. We were no longer a helpless giant. It was now clear what the president meant when during the 1980 campaign he declared, "There is a lesson for us all in Vietnam . . . let us tell those who fought that war that we will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war that our government is afraid to let them win."

The philosophical groundwork for such interventionism had been laid in 1979 by Jeane Kirkpatrick (later Reagan's United Nations ambassador) in an article entitled, "Dictatorships and Double Standards." Now such thinking had a base in reality. After Grenada it became easier to reimagine Vietnam as a war that America could have won. No longer did the Vietnam vet have to be a 1970s figure like the sensitive, crippled hero John Voight played in *Coming Home*. The vet of the 1980s could be Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo, whose rage and muscularity argue that we did not lose Vietnam on the battlefield and who on going back to rescue his POW buddies asks the perfect Reagan question, "This time do we get to win?"

The domestic equivalent of Rambo was the Wall Street buccaneer, the takeover artist that financier Asher Edelman sought to cultivate in his Columbia Business School course, "Corporate Raiding—The Art of War," when he offered a hundred-thousand-dollar bounty to any student who found a company he could acquire. The real economic hero of the culture of triumph would, however, be the dream consumer, the yuppie. It was the yuppie lifestyle that the Reagan administration had in mind when it adopted the logic of the Laffer curve, which said that if tax rates, especially at the upper level, were lowered, the rich would try to get even richer and in so doing improve the economy and government revenues.

There would, of course, be jokes about the materialism of yuppies and their passion for brand names. But the yuppie was someone the 1980s culture quickly learned to love. As the popular television sitcom, *Family Ties*, showed, the yuppie was the button-down kid who knew the path to the good life. His 1960s baby-boom parents might not understand his ambitions, but they could not help being impressed (particularly when he was as likable as Michael J. Fox's Alex Keaton) with how good he was at looking out for number one.

For Ronald Reagan the roots of an America in which patriotism and prosperity reigned supreme lay in the Revolution. There we had established our independence. There, as he told the nation in a July 4th radio address, we "began with a tax revolt." The key was to go back to the future. "Our new beginning is a continuation of that beginning created two centuries ago," the president declared in his second inaugural. He would not, however, rely on rhetoric or legislation alone to define the "Second American Revolution" he was after. As he knew from his Hollywood days, the essence of modern America was image.

For Reagan and the culture of triumph, the extravaganza thus became the crucial public event of the 1980s. Nothing else so clearly dramatized what both were about or showed what the President meant when he said, "When I spoke about a new beginning, I was talking about much more than budget cuts and incentives for savings and investment. I was

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talking about a fundamental change . . . that honors the legacy of the Founding Fathers."

The first inauguration with its $8 million price tag for four days of celebration set the tone for the extravaganzas that would follow. It began with an $800,000 fireworks display at the Lincoln Memorial, followed by two nights of show business performances presided over by the Reagans, and, finally, on the fourth day, nine inaugural balls that conjured up the image of an American Versailles. From Almaden Vineyards came 14,400 bottles of champagne. From the Society of American Florists $13,000 worth of roses. From Ridgewell's caterers 400,000 hors d'oeuvres. "When you've got to pay $2,000 for a limousine for four days, $7 to park, and $2.50 to check your coat at a time when most people in the country can't hack it, that's ostentation," Senator Barry Goldwater groused. Goldwater had missed the point. The extravaganzas of the 1980s, like the culture of triumph, would not be concerned with the work ethic of small-town America. They were advertisements for America the Grand, and their aesthetic, as Reagan-era historian Sidney Blumenthal shrewdly observed, was one in which the beautiful was the expensive, the good was the costly.

The inaugural aesthetic would be repeated at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. The president did not attend the games, instead contenting himself with urging the American team to "Do it for the Gipper." But in every other respect he was the dominant Olympic figure. His "new patriotism" was reflected in the crowds chanting "USA, USA" every time an American athlete competed. Most of all, the "resurgence of national pride" that the president wanted the country to feel was captured in the $6 million opening and closing ceremonies directed by Hollywood producer David Wolper. "The tone of the opening ceremony is going to be majesty," Wolper promised, and what followed were the most political Olympics since 1936. Wolper's plan to have an eagle take off from the west rim of the Coliseum and soar down onto the field during the playing of the national anthem was cancelled at the last minute. But everything else went like clockwork. Church bells rang throughout the city. A plane wrote "WELCOME" across the sky, and a cast of nine thousand—including 125 trumpeters, three hundred placard bearers, and eighty-four pianists playing "Rhapsody in Blue"—performed on cue.

The peak in extravaganzas came two years later, on July 4, 1986, with the hundredth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. It was the perfect Reagan moment, an occasion to match the politics of restoration with the restoration of a national monument. On opening night as the faces of the president and his wife were superimposed on the image of the relit statue, he took the tribute in stride, as if such a blending of iconography were only natural. Later he would speak of his tax bill putting a smile on Liberty, but here, as at his inaugural, the president knew that the best way to be effective was to play a role. The spectacle of Liberty Weekend, like that of the Olympics, was left to David Wolper to orchestrate. With a $30 million budget and no athletes to worry about, Wolper had few constraints. Television rights for the weekend went to ABC for $10 million. Millions more came from sponsors paying to use the statue in their advertising. Like the candy makers who carved a fourteen-foot chocolate replica of Liberty or the caterer who molded her likeness out of sixty pounds of chopped liver, Wolper was free to let scale dictate choice.

On Thursday a 1.4 million-watt series of laser beams shot across New York harbor to illuminate the relit statue for the first time. On Friday, following the largest assembly of ships since the end of World War II, the evening concluded with the largest fireworks display in U.S. history (twenty tons of materials, 40,000 projectiles) computer coordinated to music played aboard the carrier John F. Kennedy by the Marine Corps band), and on Sunday the greatest spectacle of all at Meadowlands Stadium in New Jersey: a cast of 12,000, including two hundred Elvis Presley impersonators, three hundred Jazzercise dancers, and an eight-hundred-voice chorus, performing on a twenty-tier stage with five waterfalls. The extravaganza's message was again unmistakable. To be American was to be powerful and to be powerful was to be rich.

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What about the homeless, whom Los Angeles police had continually swept off the streets during the Olympics? Or the poor, whom the Statue of Liberty welcomed but who were not welcome at Liberty Weekend? "The social safety net for the elderly, the needy, the disabled, and the unemployed will be left intact," the president promised. But the crucial point was that such a safety net, like the safety net for the circus aerialist, was to be kept out of sight. The problem with our concern for the poor, both the Reagan administration and the culture of triumph held, was that in the past it had crippled them. In his influential 1984 book, *Losing Ground,* conservative Charles Murray of the Manhattan Institute described how, as a result of relaxed welfare standards and liberal court rulings, the 1960s had made it easier for the poor to get along without jobs and get away with crimes. For Ronald Reagan, the Murray view of poverty offered the perfect reason to cut back on aiding the poor. "Federal welfare programs have created a massive social problem," he insisted. "Government created a poverty trap that wreaks havoc on the very support system the poor most need to lift themselves out of poverty—the family."

"Reagan made the denial of compassion respectable," New York governor Mario Cuomo would complain. "He justified it by saying not only that the government wasted money, but also that poor people were somehow better off without government help in the first place." The country was, however, in no mood to listen to Cuomo or bother with figures showing that in the 1980s the living standard of the bottom fifth of the country dropped by 8 percent while that of the top fifth rose by 16 percent. Indeed, the kind of denial Reagan and Charles Murray had made respectable with regard to the poor was part of a much larger pattern of denial that was inseparable from the culture of triumph.

Irangate, the stock market crash of 1987, the scandals at the Environmental Protection Agency, the influence-peddling trials of White House aides Michael Deaver and Lyn Nofziger might easily have changed the country politically. But the culture of triumph made dwelling on such negatives a repudiation of what was best in America. We had gotten ourselves into trouble during the 1970s by imagining we were weak when we were not. There was no point in going through that again. In the president's words, "We've stopped looking at our warts and rediscovered how much there is to love in this blessed land."

A powerful counterculture might have challenged such a selective approach to events, but even at its best the counterculture of the 1980s found itself checked by the culture of triumph. The precedent set in 1980 when the mourning for John Lennon's Christmas-season assassination was quickly overshadowed by the first Reagan inaugural would continue throughout the decade. Two years after its installation, Maya Lin's elegiac, black granite Vietnam Memorial was sharing space in Constitution Gardens with Frederick Hart's bronze statues of three battle-weary infantrymen. In even less time, Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* album, with its haunting portrait of a young vet trying to eke out a living in a declining industrial town, became the musical inspiration for Chrysler automobile's upbeat "Made in the USA" commercial.

Most important, the liberal tradition that might have provided the counterculture of the 1980s with a political base collapsed. When accused of being a liberal during the 1988 presidential debates, Michael Dukakis complained about being labeled, before declaring weeks later that he was a liberal in the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy. But the damage was done. By the end of the second presidential debate, the liberalism of Dukakis and the Democrats lay exposed as a narrow proceduralism—"scolding," Congressman Barney Frank would call it—that made upholding the law the remedy for everything from crime in the street to Irangate.

In the end the 1980s would have no antidote for the cult of success that the culture of triumph made its centerpiece. When the public extravaganzas of the Reagan administration ended, the private extravaganzas of the superrich replaced them. In the summer of 1989 Wall Street financier Saul Steinberg's $1

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million fiftieth birthday party was not even the event of the season. That honor would go to publisher Malcolm Forbes for a $2 million seventieth birthday party in Morocco. There he and 800 guests (flown from the United States on three jet airplanes) would be entertained by 600 acrobats, jugglers, and belly dancers, have an honor guard of 300 Berber horsemen, and consume 216 magnums of champagne in toasts.

"How do you defend it? I don't try to defend it," Forbes would say of his party. A few years earlier, shortly before his conviction for insider trading, Wall Street arbitrager Ivan Boesky put the same sentiments in even blunter language. "I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself," Boesky told the press. Over the course of the 1980s, such thinking would apply to the arts as well. "Plutography," Tom Wolfe's neologism for "the graphic depiction of the acts of the rich," would become the decade's guiding aesthetic. Plutography would define novels like Wolfe's own best seller, *The Bonfire of the Vanities,* with its portrait of Sherman McCoy, a Wall Street broker who lives in a world where at forty you are either making a million a year or you're an incompetent. In an even more obvious way, plutography would define television's hit series. *Dynasty* and *Dallas* would make family money wars the heart of weekly programming and pave the way for Robin Leach's *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,* which would take viewers on shopping trips along Rodeo Drive and into the homes of the wealthy. Even the fine arts were not immune from the 1980s cult of success. Soho art dealer Mary Boone became as well known as the artists in her stable (among them David Salle and Julian Schnabel) for her ability to sell their work to the right collectors (those with museum connections), then promote it so that its secondary market (resale) value skyrocketed.

The ultimate link between consumerism and high art would, however, be the Bloomingdale's-Metropolitan Museum alliance. In 1980 both turned their attention to aristocratic China and what the Bloomingdale ads called "forty centuries of opulence." But the link would not end here. What Bloomingdale's was packaging as fashion the Met was packaging as art. Robes from the Met's "Costumes of China" exhibit were first shown to the public at Bloomingdale's along with the reproductions the store was selling. Then, on being returned to the Met, the robes were displayed on mannequins dressed by Met curator and former *Harper's Bazaar* fashion editor Diana Vreeland. The problem, as critics were quick to point out, was that the Met mannequins were not dressed in accord with Chinese custom. What dictated their layered look in the museum was what had dictated their look at Bloomingdale's: the illusion of fashionable luxury they could be made to convey.

The same fascination with success and wealth would be more pronounced in the decade's personal fashion. While the Met's Chinese costume exhibit was going on, the *New York Times Magazine* carried an article by Francesca Stanfill, "Living Well is the Best Revenge," that heralded the arrival of an era in which the successful "have no fear of ostentation, nor are they inhibited by the pressure of discretion that often characterizes those with old fortunes." The article was about Oscar and Françoise de la Renta, but it was no less applicable to the Reagans. The president in his jodhpurs and Nancy Reagan in her $25,000 worth of inaugural gowns ($46,000 for the second inaugural) were once again paving the way for the culture of triumph. As novelist and style critic Alison Lurie observed, "The rich need to look secure now, and to look secure you need to look rich." Before the decade was up, even the stores selling the new elegance would figure out ways to flaunt it. To make its flagship store in New York fit its clothes image, Ralph Lauren's gutted the inside of the 1898 Rhinelander mansion, changing it to look like a cross between an English country house and a gentleman's club.

Nor would the changes stop here. The 1980s were not only the decade of the power lunch and the power tie, but the power physique. A decade earlier the middle class had jogged its way to health. In the 1980s it powered its way to health with the Nautilus machine, and when that didn't work, there was always liposuction. As the Calvin Klein Obsession for Men

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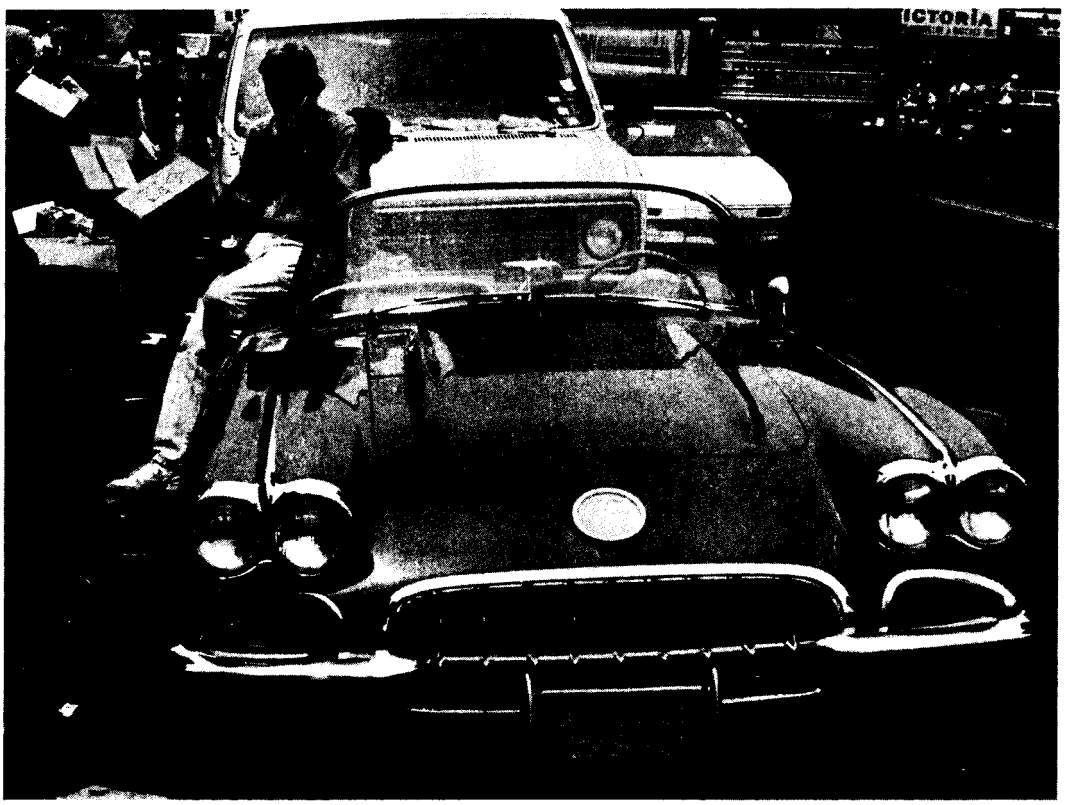
cologne ads—with their muscular male and female nude models—showed, the point of the new elegance was to make it clear that what lay below all the surface luxury was raw power.

Even romance would be unable to resist the success ethic of the culture of triumph. The essence of romance in the 1980s became the successful marriage. (By 1989 even *Playboy* founder Hugh Hefner had remarried.) In the age of AIDS, such a change made sexual sense, but nothing fueled the change so much as money and the vision of a home in which husband and wife were proven wage earners. As Mike Nichols's 1988 film, *Working Girl*, showed, even office romance was different. The Staten Island-born secretary of *Working Girl* proves herself lovable not by being helpless but by being a financial wiz. When her Wellesley-educated boss gets hurt in a skiing accident, she substitutes for her and pulls off a takeover that wins the heart of her future husband, a Wall Street broker. What dazzles him is that she is better in business than he. He can marry her with the assurance that rather than taking a financial risk he is forming a partnership that will leave him better off. At the end of the film, there is no romantic talk about babies or housework. As music floods the soundtrack, we see the former secretary, now with an office and secretary of her own, starting her work day confident that she has at last arrived where she wants to be.

"They called it the Reagan Revolution, and I'll accept that, but for me it always seemed like the Great Rediscovery: a rediscovery of our values and our common sense," Ronald Reagan would declare in his farewell address. The president's valediction was a perfect description of the way in which the culture of triumph that he championed throughout the 1980s managed to legitimize its aims and delegitimize those of its opponents. Far less gifted politicians than the president learned from his example that if the past could be



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appropriated it was a powerful weapon. Attorney General Edwin Meese would justify his attacks on the Warren court by charging that it had violated the "original intention" of the Constitution. Secretary of Education William Bennett would oppose the liberalization of college curriculums on the grounds that it disregarded "the American common culture." Even the media found that they could gain new legitimacy by wrapping themselves in the past. Trying to regain readers it had lost to the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, *Good Housekeeping* magazine would appeal to a woman it called the "New Traditionalist." "She's a contemporary woman," the *Good Housekeeping* ads declared, "who has made a new commitment to the traditional values that some people thought were old fashioned."

The *Good Housekeeping* ads could be written off as self-promotion. But the nostalgia of the president and men like Meese and Bennett was another story. It was rooted in the kind of historical absolutism that prompted the president's favorite televangelist, Jerry Falwell, to call America "back to biblical morality, back to sensibility, and back to patriotism." What lay behind such calls to action was the belief that the foundations of contemporary precedent were shaky. They could be challenged wherever they conflicted with the country's authentic past. There was not need for the modern conservative to adopt traditional conservative restraint.

The legal consequences of such thinking were immediately apparent in the willingness of the Reagan appointees to the Supreme Court to overturn precedents established a decade earlier in affirmative action and abortion rights. But the most dramatic indication of what the historical absolutism of the culture of triumph meant for the 1980s would come with the Bush administration's response to a Supreme Court decision it did not expect: the 1989 ruling upholding flag burning as symbolic speech protected by the First Amendment.

"The flag represents and reflects the fabric of our nation—our dreams, our destiny, our very fiber as a people," the new President declared angrily as he called for a constitutional amendment to make flag desecration illegal. His language, his insistence that the fabric of the flag and the fabric of the country were the same, was pure Reaganism, as was the backdrop, the Iwo Jima Memorial, he chose for his speech. But the moment was also one that summed up how much the culture of triumph, with its symbolism and claims on the past, had come to dominate American life in the 1980s. Even the low-cal Reaganism of George Bush could not escape its hold. In the final year of the decade, it was no longer hubris to think that what the Founding Fathers really meant by the First Amendment needed to be spelled out with another amendment. □

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Todd Gitlin

BLIPS, BITES & SAVVY TALK

Television's Impact on American Politics

In the pilot film for the 1987 television series *Max Headroom,* an investigative reporter discovers that an advertiser is compressing television commercials into almost instantaneous "blipverts," units so high-powered they can cause some viewers to explode. American television has long been compressing politics into chunks, ten-second "bites," and images that freeze into icons as they repeat across millions of screens and newspapers. The 1980s were saturated with these memorialized moments. Think of Ronald Reagan at the Korean DMZ, wearing a flak jacket, field glasses, keeping an eye on the North Korean Communists; or in the bunker at Omaha Beach, simulating the wartime performance he had spared himself during the actual World War II. Think of the American medical student kissing American soil after the troops had evacuated him from Grenada. Think of Star Wars animation and Oliver North saluting. The sense of history as a collage reaches some sort of twilight of the idols when we think of the 1988 election. There it is hard to think of anything *but* blips and bites: the Pledge of Allegiance; George Bush touring the garbage of Boston Harbor (leaving aside that some of the spot was shot elsewhere); the face of Willie Horton; the mismatch of tank and Michael Dukakis. The question I want to raise is whether chunk news has caused democratic politics to explode.

Although I pose the question in an extreme form, it is hardly alien to 1988's endless campaign journalism. Indeed, the journalists were obsessed with the question of whether media images had become the campaign, and if so, whose fault that was. That obsession is itself worth scrutiny. But consider first the coverage itself. According to the most relentless of studies as well as the evidence of the senses, the main mode of campaign journalism is the horse-race story. Here is that preoccupation—indeed, enchantment—with means characteristic of a society that is competitive, bureaucratic, professional, and technological all at once. The big questions of the campaign, in poll and story, are *Who's ahead? Who's falling behind? Who's gaining?*

This is an observation only a fool would deny. I recall a conversation I had with a network correspondent in 1980. I criticized the horse-race coverage of the primaries. "I know," he said. "We've been trying to figure out what we can do differently. We haven't been able to figure it out." To a great though not universal extent, the media still haven't. They can't. The popularity of unexamined military and sports metaphors like "campaign" and "race" shows how deep the addiction runs. This is a success culture bedazzled by sports statistics and empty of criteria other than numbers to answer the question, "How am I doing?" Journalists compete, news organizations compete—the channeled aggression of the race is what makes their blood run. In the absence of a vital polis, they take polls.

By 1988, the obsession had reached new heights, or depths: one night, ABC News devoted fourteen minutes, almost two-thirds of the news section of the newscast, to a poll—a bigger bloc by far than was given to any issue. In a perverse way, the journalists' fancy for

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polls is a stratagem directed toward mastery. Here at least is something they know how to do, something they can be good at without defying their starting premise, which is, after all, deference. Their stance is an insouciant subservience. They have imposed upon themselves a code they call objectivity but that is more properly understood as a mixture of obsequiousness and fatalism—it is not "their business" in general to affront the authorities, not "their place" to declare who is lying and who is right. Starting from the premise that they haven't the right to raise issues the candidates don't raise or explore records the candidates don't explore, they can at least ask a question they feel entitled to answer: "Who's ahead?" How can racing addicts be chased away from the track?

By 1988 the fact that the horse race had become the principal "story" was itself "old news." Many in the news media had finally figured out one thing they could do differently. They could take the audience backstage, behind the horse race, into the paddocks, the stables, the clubhouse, and the bookie joints. But this time horse-race coverage was joined by handicapping coverage—stories about campaign tactics, what the handlers were up to, how the reporters felt about being handled: in short, *How are the candidates trying to do it to us, and how are they doing at it?* Anxiety lay behind this new style—anxiety that Reagan really had pulled the Teflon over their eyes, that they had been suckered by the smoothly whirring machinery of his stagecraft. So handicapping coverage was a defensive maneuver, and a self-flattering one: the media could in this way show that they were immune from the ministrations of campaign professionals.

The result is what many people call a postmodern move, in two senses: enchantment with the means toward the means and ingratiation via a pass at deconstruction. There is a lot of this in American culture nowadays: the postmodern high culture of the 1960s (paintings calling attention to their paintedness, novels exposing their novelistic machinery) has swept into popular culture. An aspirin commercial dizzyingly toys with itself ("I'm not a doctor, though I play one on TV," says a soap opera actor); an Isuzu commercial bids for trust by using subtitles to expose the lies of the overenthusiastic pitchman; actors face the audience and speak "out of character" in *Moonlighting*. Campaign coverage in 1988 reveled in this mode. Viewers were invited to be cognoscenti of their own bamboozlement.

This was the campaign that made "sound bite," "spin control," "spin doctor," and "handler" into household phrases. Dukakis handlers even made a commercial about Bush handlers wringing their hands about how to handle Dan Quayle, a commercial that went over far better with hip connoisseurs than with the unhip rest of the audience who had trouble tracing the commercial to Dukakis. This campaign metacoverage, coverage of the coverage, partakes of the postmodern fascination with surfaces and the machinery that cranks them out, a fascination indistinguishable from surrender—as if once we understand that all images are concocted we have attained the only satisfaction the heart and mind are capable of. (This is the famous Brechtian "alienation effect" but with a difference: Brecht thought that actors, by standing outside and "presenting" their characters, could lay bare social relations and show that life could be changed; paradoxically, campaign metacoverage, by laying bare the campaign's tactics and inside doings, demonstrates only that the campaign is a juggernaut that cannot be diverted.) Thus, voiceovers explained knowingly that the candidate was going to a flag factory or driving a tank in order to score public relations points. Here, for example, is ABC's Brit Hume narrating the appearance of George Bush at a flag factory on September 20, 1988: "Bush aides deny he came here to wrap himself in the flag, but if that wasn't the point of this visit, what was it?"

In the same vein was the new postdebate ritual: the networks featuring campaign spin doctors, on camera, telling reporters why their respective candidates had done just fine, while the network correspondents affected an arch superiority and print reporters insisted that the spin doctors couldn't spin *them*. Meanwhile, the presumably unspinnable pundits rattled on about how the candidates performed, whether

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they had given good sound bite—issuing reviews, in other words, along with behind-the-scenes assessments of the handlers' skill in setting expectations for the performance, so that, for example, if Dan Quayle succeeded in speaking whole sentences he was to be decreed a success in "doing what he set out to do."

These rituals exhibited the insouciant side of insouciant subservience—reporters dancing attendance at the campaign ball while insisting that they were actually following their own beat. Evaluating the candidates' claims and records was considered highbrow and boring—and potentially worse. For to probe too much or too far into issues, to show too much initiative in stating the public problems, would be seen by the news business as hubris, a violation of their unwritten agreement to let the candidates set the public agenda. Curiously, the morning shows, despite their razzmatazz, may have dwelt on issues more than the nightly news—largely because the morning interviewers were not so dependent on Washington insiders, not so tightly bound to the source cultivating and glad-handing that guide reportage inside the Beltway. It was a morning show that discovered that the Bush and Dukakis campaigns had hired the same Hollywood lighting professionals to illuminate their rallies. (Possibly the Dukakis handlers had learned from Mondale's blunder in turning a 1984 debate lighting decision over to Reagan's more skilled people, leaving Mondale showing rings under his eyes—so Michael Deaver told Mark Hertsgaard, as reported in Hertsgaard's *On Bended Knee*.)

As befit the new and sometimes dizzying self-consciousness, reporters sometimes displayed, even in public, a certain awareness that they were players in a game not of their own scripting; that they could be had, and were actively being had, by savvy handlers; and that they were tired of being had. The problem first acquired media currency with a tale told by Hedrick Smith, in his 1988 book *The Power Game*, about a 1984 campaign piece by Leslie Stahl. Here is Stahl's own version of the story as she told it the night after the election on ABC's *Viewpoint*:

> This was a five-minute piece on the evening news . . . at the end of President Reagan's '84 campaign, and the point of the piece was to really criticize him for—I didn't use this language in the piece—but the point was, he was trying to create amnesia over the budget cuts. For instance . . . I showed him at the Handicapped Olympics, and I said, you wouldn't know by these pictures that this man tried to cut the budget for the handicapped. And the piece went on and on like that. It was very tough, and I was very nervous about going back to the White House the next day, Sam [she is talking to fellow panelist Sam Donaldson], because I thought they'd never return my phone calls and they'd keep returning yours. [This is Exhibit B on factors inhibiting press criticism: the competition of the pack, which can produce protracted press honeymoons and pile-ons.—T.G.] But my phone rang, and it was a White House official [presumably Michael Deaver, the propagandist-in-chief], and he said, "Great piece, Leslie." And I said, "Come on, that was a tough—what do you mean, 'great piece'?" And he said, "We loved it, we loved it, we loved it. Thank you very much. It was a five-minute commercial, you know, unpaid commercial for our campaign." I said, "Didn't you hear what I said? I was tough." "Nobody heard what you said. They just saw the five minutes of beautiful pictures of Ronald Reagan. They saw the balloons, they saw the flags, they saw the red, white and blue. Haven't you people figured out yet that the picture always overrides what you say?' "

The 1988 answer was, apparently not. For the networks and the candidates (successful candidates, anyway) share an interest in what they consider "great pictures," that is, images that evoke myths. Curiously, the famous cynicism of journalists does not keep them from being gullible. Indeed, in this setting, cynicism and gullibility are two sides of the same con. The handlers count on the gullible side when they gamble that cameras, to paraphrase the ex-president's masterful slip on the subject of facts, are stupid things. That is why the Reagan staffers were proud of their public relations triumphs; their business was to produce what one of them called "our little playlets"—far-flung photo opportunities with real-life backdrops. Print reporters, meanwhile, were unable or unwilling to proceed differently. Although the pressure for "great pictures" doesn't apply, at least in the establishment press, the print people are unwilling to cede the "playlets" to television; they compete

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on television's terms, leaving the handlers free to set their agendas for them.

What is not altogether clear, of course, is whether the Reagan staffers were right to be proud of their public relations triumphs. We don't know, in fact, that "the picture always overrides what you say." Possibly that is true for some audiences, at some times, in some places, and not for others. What is clear, though, is that when the picture is stark enough, or the bite bites hard enough, journalists, especially on television, are unwilling to forgo the drama. To be boring is the cardinal sin. Embarrassed by their role as relay stations for orchestrated blips and bites, even amply rewarded journalists purport to resent the way Reagan's staff made megaphones of them; at the least they have become acutely self-conscious about their manipulability. The White House and the television-led press have been scrambling for relative advantage since the Kennedy administration; metacoverage was the press's attempt to recoup some losses.

Too Hip for Words

But to make sense of metacoverage I want to look at the dominant form of political consciousness in a formally open but fundamentally depoliticized society, which is savviness.

Already in 1950, David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* described what he called the inside dopester—a consumer of politics who

> may be one who has concluded (with good reason) that since he can do nothing to change politics, he can only understand it. Or he may see all political issues in terms of being able to get some insider on the telephone. [In any case] he is politically cosmopolitan. . . . He will go to great lengths to keep from looking and feeling like the uninformed outsider.

The goal is "never to be taken in by any person, cause, or event."

Over the past forty years, Riesman's inside dopester has evolved into another type: a harsher, more brittle and cynical type still more knowledgeable in the ways in which things really work, still more purposefully disengaged, still more knowledgeable in a managerial way, allergic to political commitments. The premium attitude is a sort of knowing appraisal. Speaking up is less important—certainly less fun—than sizing up. Politics, real politics, is for "players"—fascinating term, for it implies that everyone else is a spectator. To be "interested in politics" is to know how to rate the players: Do they have good hands? How do they do in the clutch? How are they positioning themselves for the next play?

Savviness flatters spectators that they really do understand, that people like them are in charge, that even if they live outside the Beltway, they remain sovereign. Keeping up with the maneuvers of Washington insiders, defining the issues as they define them, savviness appeals to a spirit both managerial and voyeuristic. It transmutes the desire to participate into spectacle. One is already participating, in effect, by watching. "I like to watch" is *the* premium attitude. If you have a scorecard, you can tell the players. The ultimate inside dopesters are the political journalists.

Today, both advertising and political coverage flourish on, and suffer from, what Mark Crispin Miller has called "the hipness unto death." Miller argues that television advertising has learned to profess its power by apparently mocking it, standing aside from vulgar claims, assuring the viewer that all of us knowing types are too smart to be taken in by advertising, or gaucherie or passion of any kind. In the same way, the postmodern savviness of political coverage—whether in the glib version of a Bruce Morton or the more sedate version of MacNeil/Lehrer—binds its audience closer to an eerie politics of half-truth, deceit, and evasion in which ignorant symbols clash by night. If the players evade an issue, the savvy spectator knows enough to lose interest in it as well.

Coverage of the horse race and metacoverage of the handicappers both suit the discourse of savviness. They invite and cultivate an inside dopester's attitude toward politics—vicarious fascination coupled with knowing indifference.

It might well be, then, that Leslie Stahl's 1984 piece, like many others, was really three

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pieces. A critical audience got her point—Reagan was a hypocrite. An image-minded audience got the White House's point—Reagan personified national will and caring, even as the nice-guy martyr to wise-ass Eastern commentators. And inside dopesters got still another point—Reagan, master performer, was impervious to quarrelsome voiceovers.

Perhaps, too, there was a fourth piece—the backstage drama in which the White House made a point of showing Leslie Stahl her place. This must be humiliating for any reporter so old-fashioned as to want to take the measure of images against realities. Stahl's story reveals that the only alternative to complicity would be the damn-it-all spirit of an outsider indifferent to whether the handlers will favor her with scoop-worthy tidbits of information the next time. While telling Stahl that she's been had, the White House knows that, given her understanding of her job, she's going to be coming back for more stories; Deaver, the public relations man, knows that the surest way to make a reporter complicit is to treat her as an insider. As long as the agenda is set by the White House, or the campaign, the watchdog is defanged.

An Audience for the Spectacle

More must be said about what I just called the image-minded audience. For 1988 was not only the year of metacoverage; it was the year of the negative commercial, the bite, the clip, the image-blip. In theory, these chunks are television's distinct forte: the emotion-laden image in which an entire narrative is instantly present—Willie Horton, the flag, Bush with his granddaughter. The image is what rivets; the image is what is remembered. Research done by Ronald Lembo in the sociology department at Berkeley shows that some television viewers are inclined to follow narrative while others, disproportionately the young, pay more attention to distinct, out-of-context images.

What professional handlers and television journalists alike do is find images that condense their "little playlets," images that satisfy both lovers of story and lovers of image. Then blip-centered television floods the audience with images that compress and evoke an entire narrative. The 1980s began with one of these: the blindfolded American featured on the long-running melodrama called "America Held Hostage," sixty-three weeks of it during 1979–81, running on ABC at 11:30 five nights a week, propounding an image of America as a "pitiful helpless giant" (in Richard Nixon's phrase). Those were the months when Walter Cronkite signed off at CBS night after night by ticking off "the umpty-umpth day of captivity for the American hostages in Iran." In this ceremony of innocence violated, the moment arose to efface the national brooding over Vietnam. Now it could be seen that the Vietnam trauma had eclipsed the larger truth: it was the anti-Americans who were ugly. In the 1980s the American was the paleface captive of redskins. It was the anti-American blindfold that disfigured him. The image cried out for a man to ride out of the sagebrush on a white horse into the White House. The script for the Teheran playlet was not written by the Reagan handlers (although it is possible that they promised weapons to Iran's Revolutionary Guards in exchange for their keeping the hostages until election day), but they certainly knew how it would end.

We know how adept Reagan was at performing his playlets—he'd been doing them all his life. For eight years we heard endlessly, from reporters rushing about with spray cans of Teflon, about the mysterious personal qualities of the Great Communicator-in-Chief. But the mighty Wurlitzer of the media was primed for a figure who knew how to play upon it. The adaptability of the apparatus is exhibited by the media success of even so maladroit a figure as George Bush during the 1988 election. Having declared that Bush's central problem was to lick the wimp image, the media allowed him to impress them that once he started talking tough he turned out "stronger than expected." In their own fashion, Bush and his handlers—some of them fresh from Reagan's team—followed. Their masterwork was a Bush commercial that opens with a still photo on the White House lawn: Reagan to the right, at the side of the frame; Gorbachev at the center, shaking hands with the stern-faced Bush. The camera moves in on the vice president and Gorbachev; Reagan is left behind—having presided, he yields

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gracefully to his successor, the new man of the hour. As the camera moves closer, the stern face and the handshake take over, while the voiceover speaks the incantation: "strong . . . continue the arms control process . . . a president ready to go to work on day one." The entire saga is present in a single image: Bush the heir, the reliable, the man of strength who is also savvy enough to deal.

An American Tradition

How new is the reduction of political discourse to the horse race, the handicapping, the tailoring of campaigns to the concoction of imagery? What is particular to television? How good were the good old days?

Tempting as it is to assume that television has corrupted a previously virginal politics, the beginning of wisdom is history. As the campaigns invite us to read their blips, alarm is amply justified—but not because American politics has fallen from a pastoral of lucid debate and hushed, enlightened discourse to a hellish era of mudslinging and degraded sloganeering. Television did not invent the superficiality, triviality, and treachery of American politics. American politics has been raucous, deceptive, giddy, shallow, sloganeering, and demagogic for most of its history. "Infotainment" is in the American grain. So is reduction and spectacle—and high-minded revulsion against both.

Is negative campaigning new? In 1828, supporters of Andrew Jackson charged that John Quincy Adams had slept with his wife before marrying her, and that, while minister to Russia, he had supplied the Czar with a young American mistress. In turn, pro-Adams newspapers accused Jackson of adultery, gambling, cockfighting, bigamy, slave-trading, drunkenness, theft, lying, and murder. Jackson was said to be the offspring of a prostitute's marriage to a mulatto. Papers accused Jackson's previously divorced wife of having moved in with him while still married to her first husband. Not that all mud sticks. Some mud makes the slinger slip. In 1884 a Protestant minister called the Democrats the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion" as the Republican James G. Blaine stood by without demurral— which may well have cost Blaine the election.

Is the preference for personality over issues new? Once elected president, Andrew Jackson set to wiping out Indian tribes—but this was not an issue in the campaign that elected him, any more than the New Deal was an issue in the campaign that elected Franklin Roosevelt in 1932. (Roosevelt campaigned for a balanced budget.)

Are the blip and the bite new? "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," the leading slogan of 1840, does not exactly constitute a Lincoln-Douglas debate. That year, according to Kathleen Hall Jamieson's *Packaging the Presidency*, followers of William Henry "Tippecanoe" Harrison carried log cabins in parades, circulated log cabin bandanas and banners, gave away log cabin pins, and sang log cabin songs, all meant to evoke the humble origins of their candidate—although Harrison had been born to prosperity and had lived only briefly in a log cabin. A half century later, in 1896, Mark Hanna, McKinley's chief handler, was the first campaign manager to be celebrated in his own right. Hanna acquired the reputation of a "phrasemaker" for giving the world such bites as "The Advance Agent of Prosperity," "Full Dinner Pail," and "Poverty or Prosperity," which were circulated on posters, cartoons, and envelope stickers, the mass media of the time. Hanna "has advertised McKinley as if he were a patent medicine!" marveled that earnest student of modern techniques, Theodore Roosevelt. In that watershed year, professional management made its appearance, and both candidates threw themselves into a whirl of public activity.

I draw the information about Hanna from an important book by Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928*. McGerr presents considerable evidence that from 1840 (the "Tippecanoe" campaign) through 1896, vast numbers of people participated in the pageantry of presidential campaigns. Average turnout from 1824 to 1836 was 48 percent of eligible voters; but

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from 1876 to 1900, it was 77 percent. During the three decades after the Civil War, mass rallies commonly lasted for many hours; there were torchlight parades; there were campaign clubs and marching groups. "More than one-fifth of Northern voters probably played an active part in the campaign organizations of each presidential contest during the '70s and '80s," McGerr writes. And with popular mobilization came high voter turnout—up to 84 percent of the eligible (all-male) electorate in 1896 and 1900 before it slid to 75 percent during the years 1900–16 and 58 percent in 1920–24. (It rose again in the 1930s, with the Great Depression and the New Deal, and then started sliding again.) Arguably the mass mobilization and hoopla turned out the vote; voting was the consolidation of a communal ritual, not an isolated act by which the isolated citizen expressed piety.

In the age of professionalization, reformers recoiled. What developed in the 1870s and 1880s, with a push from so-called "educated men," was a didactic politics, what McGerr calls an "elitist" politics. The high-minded reformers insisted on a secret ballot; they approved of social science; they wanted enlightened leaders to guide the unwashed. Under their leadership, they worked toward a new-style campaign: a campaign of education. Independent journalism helped—newspapers no longer under party management. Alongside the waning partisan press, two new kinds of newspapers emerged: the high-minded independent paper with its educated tone, cultivating political discernment; and the low-minded sensational paper with its lurid tone, cultivating antipolitical passion. The way is already open to our contemporary bifurcation: the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*; Arthur Sulzberger and Rupert Murdoch; MacNeil/Lehrer and Geraldo Rivera. This split corresponds to the highbrow/lowbrow cultural split that developed around the same time, as traced by Lawrence W. Levine in his recent book of that title.

The sharply bifurcated media help divide the public: to oversimplify, a progressive middle class takes politics seriously while a diverted working class is for the most part (except for the Great Depression) disaffected. Although it took decades for this process to develop, and there were exceptional periods of working-class mobilization along the way, the lineaments of the modern campaign were already in place at the turn of the century: emphasis on the personality of the candidate, not the party; emphasis on the national campaign, not community events; a campaign of packaging, posed pictures, and slogans. Politics as a discretionary, episodic, defensive activity for the majority alongside moral politics for the few. In short, the politics of the consumer society.

The radio hookups of the 1920s made the campaigns still more national, made it possible for candidates and presidents to reach over the heads of the party apparatus directly to the electorate. The parties became gradually more redundant. Some of this was welcomed by reformers, and properly so: gradually, candidates found it harder to whisper to white southern voters what they were afraid to proclaim out loud in the north. Above all else, though, the powers of the new media made it necessary for candidates and parties to manage them. Professionally concocted newsreels played a part in the defeat of Upton Sinclair's 1934 "End Poverty in California" gubernatorial campaign. A documentary newsreel spliced together at the last minute to counter a Dewey effort probably helped Truman squeak through in 1948.

But only with television and the proliferation of primaries did media management become central and routine to political campaigns. In 1952, Eisenhower, whose campaign was the first to buy television spots, was reluctant to advertise. After 1960, when Kennedy beat a sweating, five-o'clock-shadowed Nixon among those who watched the debate while losing among those who heard it on the radio, the handwriting was on the screen. The time of the professional media consultant had arrived. When his hour came round again in 1968, the new Nixon had learned to use—and submit to—the professional image managers. Nixon, the first president from southern California, moved advertising and public relations people into his high command. And not just for the campaign. The president in office could use the

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same skills. Haldeman and Ehrlichman, with their enemies lists and provocateur tactics, were the founding fathers of what Sidney Blumenthal later called "the permanent campaign"—a combination of polling, image-making, and popularity-building strategy that Reagan developed to the highest of low arts.

The pattern seems set for the 1980s: metacoverage for the cognoscenti, spurious pageantry for the majority. *The McLaughlin Group* for the know-it-all; Morton Downey, Jr. for the know-nothing. As the spectacle becomes more scripted and routine—the nominating conventions are the obvious example—more of the audience turns off. The spectacular version of politics that television delivers inspires political withdrawal along with pseudo-sophistication. As the pundits and correspondents pontificate in their savvy way, they take part in a circular conversation—while an attuned audience, wishing to be taken behind the scenes, is invited to inspect the strategies of the insiders, whether via the chilly cynicism of a Bruce Morton or the college-try bravado of a Sam Donaldson. Savviness is the tribute a spectacular culture pays to the pleasures of democracy. Middle-class outsiders want to be in the know, while the poor withdraw further and don't even vote. Politics, by these lights, remains a business for insiders and professionals. While the political class jockeys, the rest of us become voyeurs of our political fate—or *enragés*. Can it be simple coincidence that as voting and newspaper reading plummeted in the 1980s, Morton Downey, Jr. arrived with his electronic barroom brawl, and talk radio shows proved able to mobilize the indignant against congressional salary raises? Probably not. The vacuum of public discourse is filled on the cheap. Passions are disconnected from parties, moral panics disconnected from radical or even liberal politics. The talk show hosts did not mobilize against a tax "reform" that lined the pockets of the corporate rich.

Can This Generation Be Saved?

And the future? As the artist Folon says, "I work at forgetting I'm a pessimist." Ronald Lembo's research suggests that younger viewers are more likely, when they watch television, to pay attention to disconnected images; to switch channels, "watching" more than one program at once; and to spin off into fantasies about images. Of all age groups, the young are also the least likely to read newspapers and to vote. Do we detect a chain of causation? Does a fascination with speed, quick cuts, ten-second bites, one-second "scenes," and out-of-context images suggest less tolerance for the rigors of serious argument and the tedium of modern political life? Has the attention span been shrinking; and if so, is television the cause; and what would this prophesy for our politics? Is there, in a word, an MTV generation? Future apparatchiks of the media-politics nexus are assuming it: the politicians, the Deavers, the publishers of *USA Today* and its legion of imitators. David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times* writes (March 15, 1989):

> In 1967, according to the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, 73% of the people polled said they read a newspaper every day; by last year, the number of everyday readers had fallen by almost one-third, to 50.6%. During that same period, in the 18 to 29 age group, the number of "everyday readers" dropped by more than half, from 60% to 29%.

While 26.6 percent of *Los Angeles Times* readers are aged 18 to 29, 36.2 percent of *USA Today* readers are that age. And whereas young people used to acquire the habit of newspaper reading as they aged, this is apparently no longer happening. To recoup their losses, newspapers are trying to woo the young with celebrity profiles, fitness features, household tips.

In 1988, the Department of Education published a report—a summary of research hither and yon—on television's influence on cognitive development. The widespread publicity placed the emphasis on television's harmlessness. The Associated Press story that ran in the *New York Times* was headlined: "Yes, You Too Can Get A's While Watching 'Family Ties.'" But the report itself, by Daniel R. Anderson and Patricia A. Collins of the Department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, is inconclusive on the question of whether television watching affects the capacity to pay attention. "The possibility that

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rapid pacing may produce effects over longer exposure has not been examined," reads one typical hedge. "There does . . . appear to be some effect of TV on attention, yet the importance, generality, and nature of the effect is unknown": that is the summary sentence. Someday the grants may flow for the research obligatorily called for. But pending research, one still feels entitled to the pessimism that one must then work to forget. Television may not have eroded all possibilities for democratic political life, but it has certainly not thrown open the doors to broad-based enlightenment.

I have tried to show that there is precedent for a shriveled politics of slogans, deceit, and pageantry. But precedent is nothing to be complacent about when ignorance is the product. And the problem, ultimately, is not simply that Americans are ignorant. On this score, the statistics are bad enough. According to a 1979 poll, only 30 percent of Americans responding could identify the two countries involved in the SALT II talks then going on; in 1982, only 30 percent knew that Ronald Reagan opposed the nuclear freeze; in 1985, 36 percent thought that either China, India, or Monaco was part of the Soviet Union. But ignorance is sometimes a defense against powerlessness. Why bother knowing if there's nothing you know how to do about what you know? Why get worked up? What is most disturbing is not ignorance in its own right but, rather, the coupling of ignorance and power. When the nation-state has the power to reach out and blow up cities on the other side of the world, the spirit of diversion seems, to say the least, inadequate. Neither know-it-alls nor know-nothings are likely to rise to the occasion. □

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Ross Miller

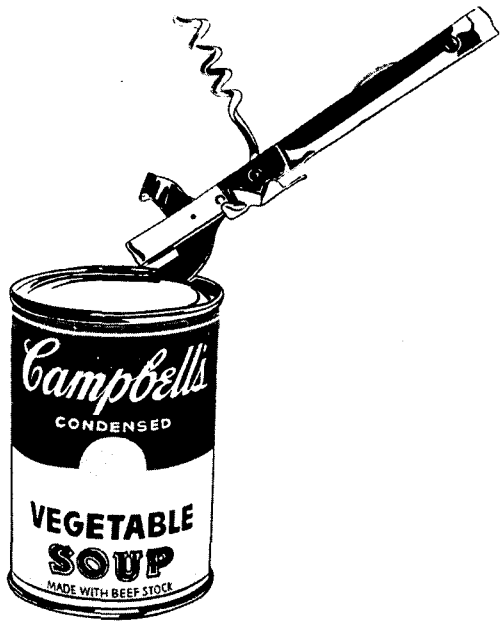
PUTTING ON THE GLITZ

Architecture after Postmodernism

Manhattan was first glitzed in late 1979 when developer Harry Helmsley and architects Emery Roth & Sons began making over a block-long property on Madison Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets. Under their direction, a mansion designed by McKim, Mead and White (1882) after the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, was reborn as a luxury hotel. Helmsley persuaded the city that simple preservation of this historic building was unprofitable. His plan took the existing structure, restored its lavish interior, and converted it to an elaborate lobby and pass-through for a sleek bronzed-glass and anodized aluminum tower that housed the guts of a new hotel. Only the color related the old building to the new. Helmsley was a pioneer.

At a time when austere functional glass office buildings defined serious East Coast cities, glitz with its brash concern for effect was thought acceptable only for the provinces: Las Vegas, Miami Beach, and Houston. The Helmsleys brought it to the heart of the city. The ripple effect has been widespread in art circles, high and low. The work of America's most prolific designers in the 1980s—Helmut Jahn, William Pedersen, John Portman, Philip Johnson, and John Burgee—reveals how glitz has gone upscale, transformed from a developer's strategy into a serious urban architecture. This transition has occurred at a time when architects have achieved celebrity status, finding themselves on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. In the way that personality displaces ideas as a subject for the media, architecture's current love of glitz has made a difficult profession more accessible to the public, transforming the artistic process, not just the product, into a commodity to be bought, sold, and traded. New York's Max Protetch Gallery does a brisk business in contemporary architectural drawings, often of projects that will never be built. Prices are graded on the relative fame of the architect, not on the inherent quality of the work.

The loaves and fishes act of multiplying the value of a one-of-a-kind object was perfected by Andy Warhol. Posthumously awarded a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, Warhol's work holds no mystery. The mind-numbing reiteration of images from Brillo and Campbell's Soup to Marilyn and Mao is treated with no change of affect. In all instances, the



Andy Warhol

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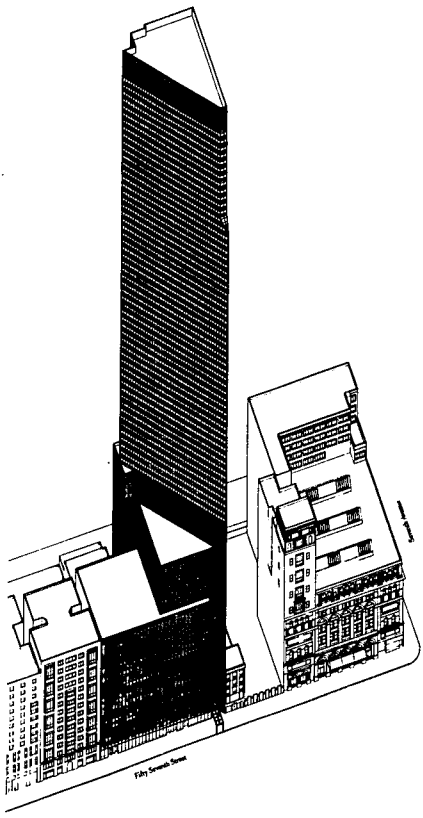
artist refuses to get involved. He chooses instead to separate the aura from the soul and we are left with labels, masks, and trademarks. Warhol celebrates surface. To him the world is a flea market. A collector of things, he despiritualizes reality. When he portrays serious subjects, like nuclear war, capital punishment, or the carnage of automobile crashes, he cannot go deep. He skims.

Architecture's adoption of surface over depth—elevation over section—in the 1980s is part of a larger social trend, celebrating a society afraid of engagement. From videos to fast food the pace is manic and the style ironic. Like an alchemist changing dross to gold, Andy Warhol reprocessed kitsch, the horribly awful and grandiose, into art. He *knew* what he was doing. The ironic stance is inseparable from the work. His implied narrative is: "Sure this is junk and I know it. But isn't it fun? Aren't we all having a good time being in the know together?" Warhol's art initiates the viewer into a shared attitude that is marketed to look exclusive, like the Hard Rock Café, but admits everyone. The initiation into these experiences does not demand hard-won knowledge, only a willingness to be momentarily stimulated, then pass on. Between soup and war, all experiences are leveled. Warhol's success was not lost on the architectural profession.

Glitz is the developer's friend. Anyone can understand its meaning, its brash assertion of wealth. Harry Macklowe, who describes himself as an "architectural designer," built Metropolitan Tower (completed in 1985) on a sensitive site neighboring Carnegie Hall, whose own air rights are now being "utilized." In the spirit of the Helmsleys, a dark glass structure with a knife edge to the street, Metropolitan Tower violates, along with Edward Larrabee Barnes's IBM Building, the historic right-angled New York City grid. A building with such an aggressive profile in the city on one of New York's primary commercial streets does not engage the reciprocal relationship between public and private but glorifies ownership. Mr. Macklowe's words:

> I am Metropolitan Tower. The tallest. The most beautiful. Soaring proudly from the heart of New York, I gaze with pleasure upon the bustling rivers, graceful bridges, glittering avenues. Central Park is my garden. The sky and clouds reflect upon my face. And no matter in which direction I look, my city offers itself to me, an endless visual feast.



Metropolitan Tower

Born in Miami Beach

Architectural glitz of the 1980s has its roots in the postwar development of Miami Beach. Like a false diamond, this architectural ice developed out of the collaboration of a pragmatic architect, Morris Lapidus, and the new Florida hotel money. This, of course, was the old glitz, the sort of thing "Saturday Night Live" comedians and strict modernist architects still ridicule. Lapidus's Fountainbleau, Americana, and Eden Roc hotels are hybrids, employing the language of modern architecture with a Yiddish accent.

Miami Beach provided an upscale, unthreatening way to attract down south a new

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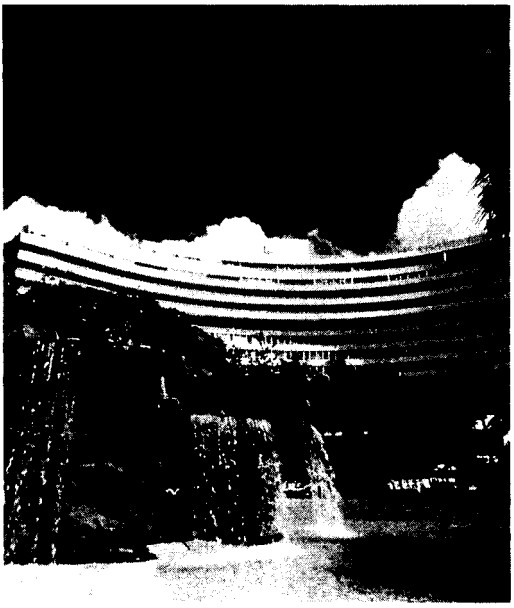

Fontainbleau Hotel

generation of prosperous Americans. The immigrant parents were lured to Art Deco Miami, their children to Miami Beach. Glitzy Las Vegas serves a similar function for vacationing Midwesterners. Both resorts sanction ostentation, for the architecture seems to license uninhibited display.

Miami's folklore of the glitzy fifties and early sixties included little about the native population, which was more or less invisible, seen only in service roles. In its prime the place inspired tales about the biggest sandwiches, pools, and showgirls. Contained as it was within an untainted white shell, Lapidus's glitz made the conspicuous consumption by a Depression generation, trained to accept austerity, appear to be a higher ethic. It was almost a duty to have fun in such a place. On a sandy strip that displaced the decaying city across the water, arrivistes had an architecture of their own. Morris Lapidus discovered a formula that combined his wonder as a young boy from Russia at seeing Coney Island in 1903 with the upscale cultural values he learned at school. The result, in his own words, was a "potpourri of anything I could put my hands on."

Miami's variety of the modern is not built to instruct. It carries none of its original associations with workers' housing and European utopian planning. But Lapidus was serious and did not patronize his clients; unlike later work, his architecture was not ironic. In his way, he transformed immigrant kitsch from a random collection of sentimental objects to a higher art version that assimilated into the larger culture. On a decidedly grander scale, he created a classy New World cultural context for what the migratory New Yorkers and New Jerseyites already knew and liked. Not surprisingly, Liberace was a favorite lounge act. Lapidus explains:

> You see, I try to understand people; my whole architecture is based on people. Who are they? What's their background, their training? They're going to come to Miami. They've heard that on the former Firestone Estate the fabulous Fountainbleau is going to be built. To begin with it had to be *fabulous*. It had to live up to this dream picture, the dream drawn by the advertising people. Where do these people get their culture? I finally came to the conclusion that most of them get their culture not from school, not from their travels, but from the movies, the cinema. If that's so, what was I to do?

Fast to learn the lessons of Miami, John Portman elaborated on the Lapidus formula. When it came time for him to build on a large scale, he did not modestly sequester the glitz behind a modernist facade but saturated the entire building in it. Portman first gained wide attention with work for the Hyatt Corporation (1967) in his hometown of Atlanta, then quickly expanded a local practice into a national and then international phenomenon. His architecture is marketed and franchised. Easily replicated, like Warhol's multiples, Portman's work has the appeal of the familiar. A Hyatt in Chicago offers essentially the same experience as one in San Francisco. Because it creates its own context, integral to itself with little or no formal connection to the local streets, visitors to the city can avoid having to confront the world outside their hotel. Portman's hyperkinetic plans provide a sense of excitement in measured doses as the glimmering details offer the reassurance of the known. One is not confronted by the austere culture of high modernism. A Portman lobby is a celebration of kitsch not for its ironic effect as Bette Midler might play it, but for its

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sentimental and grandiose associations, like the costume jewelry in grandma's nightstand.

Portman's first hotel in Atlanta is composed around a giant square space, 120 feet to a side. Framing the square are twenty-two floors of "balcony-corridors" drawn as belts around the individual rooms. The plan turns everything inside out. Streets in this fake town are safely locked inside glass. Large planters hold greenery that drapes itself over the sides. On the ground are kiosks and other diversions that keep the lobby space filled with activity. The main attraction is an elevator tower with bronzed glass cars, lit like monster Christmas ornaments, running up and down an outside track.

By making the hotel complex the anchor for urban development planned and executed by the private sector, Portman was able to convince local governments to support a radical reorganization of neglected inner city areas. In the late seventies he added the Bonaventure Hotel (Los Angeles) and Renaissance Center (Detroit) to the earlier Peachtree Center (Atlanta). To his credit, Portman, who began as a real estate developer, had the sense and energy to lead people back to the cities at a time when New York and other urban centers were in or near bankruptcy. Portman's strategy was simple enough. Take a hotel and dress it up; make it a magnet to attract people back to town. The Hyatt formula he settled on is now widely used in all its variations. He led the charge on the new Times Square with the Marriott Marquis, a fifty-story bunker fitted with its own shimmering atrium and revolving restaurant safely barricaded away from the city.

Peachtree Plaza

Out-of-towners particularly enjoy these spaces. The freedom to walk "outside" on a tenth floor balcony relieves both the claustrophobia of most large urban hotels and the anxiety of having to leave. Through the use of mirrors, lights, and shiny metallic surfaces, Portman partially creates the sensation of a real outside. A purely backlot affair, his streets are free of the perceived and real dangers of their inner city locations. At Detroit's Renaissance Center and Los Angeles's Bonaventure Hotel, glitz is used on the sleek facades to advertise a demilitarized zone within the formerly dangerous and largely abandoned Central Business District. A stiff flag on the moon, Portman's bright surfaces turn away from the historical city. Modernism promoted transparency; these glass boxes are opaque—one-way mirrors, framing beautiful views but allowing no way in.

A pioneer back to a territory thought lost, Portman proved the inner city a good investment and helped define an architectural language agreeable to the market conditions of the 1980s, where everything seemed to be on sale. His architecture exploits a rich provincial look. By importing the kind of planning and design learned in developing the suburbs, Portman's architecture treats the city as a colonial conquest. The existing city is shut out, replaced by a fantasy urbanism in a climate-controlled and secure mall. Like the English Club in prerevolutionary India or the American corporate settlements in the Middle East, the architecture of the 1980s is set off from existing buildings with little regard for context. It is an architecture for a new American generation born and raised in the suburbs.

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Suburbanized malls and atriums minimize the shock of living in the city within close proximity to different cultures and classes. For men and women fixated on the making of money, there is little interest in hassling the natural disorder of the street. The architecture eases the transition from work in a high-rise glass tower to play and consumption in a glassed-in mall. Order and control is the message as the city is exploited for its picturesque local color.

An outsider to architecture's primary axis—the Northeast, Chicago, California—Portman bridged the suburbs and the cities. Had not elements of his work been adopted by establishment designers whose work appears regularly in the prestigious European, Asian, and American architectural journals, Portman's work would have remained a provincial anomaly. But Establishment architecture's embrace of glitz made it the lingua franca of the 1980s, easing the formerly strained relationship between client and architect. The relationship between the two that had existed in the modern period was now reversed. No longer did the architect resist the developer or corporate client in order to educate him. Rather, he became his willing instrument.

Symbiosis with Corporate America

Philip Johnson was the first of the Ivy League establishment designers to understand how glitz could be used by "serious" architects to exhibit their good faith to clients uneasy with high art. He convinced developers and corporations that they could do business with him. He foreshadowed his plans, over a decade ago, in a lecture delivered at Columbia University. There he argued:

> The day of ideology is thankfully over. Let us celebrate the death of the *idée fixe*. There are no rules, only facts. There is no order, only preference. There are no imperatives, only choice; or, to use a nineteenth-century word, "taste"; or a modern word, "take". . . . I am of the opinion we have no faiths. I have none. "Free at last," I say to myself.

Johnson's accomplishment was to void modern architecture of all political associations born in the days of utopian Weimar. Projects in Dallas, Houston, Minneapolis, and St. Louis completed in the late seventies reflect his cunning, as if he were doing the out-of-town tryouts of a show before it opened on Broadway. In this way, Johnson perfected a style that merged a glittering exterior and interior with a high-tech frame. Along with the last remnant of its kitschy innocence, Johnson purged glitz of its suburban provincial qualities before he transported it to the major cities.

In Johnson's work in the 1980s, the emphasis is on a building's surface and profile rather than the space it creates. A sense of the inappropriateness and infantilized nature of his skin-deep manipulations can be seen in Chicago at the heart of the city's financial district. There Johnson/Burgee in 1983, on a site diagonally across from Daniel Burnham and John Root's Rookery Building (1885–86), built a bloated version (forty stories to the original's twenty) of that historic firm's Masonic Temple. Once an associate architect with Mies van der Rohe on the Seagram Building, Johnson turned his back on the same modern architecture he and Henry-Russell Hitchcock zealously championed in 1932 in *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*. This conversion was symbolically completed when Johnson and John Burgee relocated their firm from the Seagram Building, where it had been located since the building opened in 1958, to one designed by them on Third Avenue and 53rd Street.

The "Lipstick" Building is an oval structure on a typical New York right-angled lot. A thirty-four-story tower of glass and Swedish Imperial granite banding between floors, it is designed to stand out, to create its own context. Architectural historian Spiro Kostof calls this present state of urbanism the "one-of-each syndrome" and compares it to the turn-of-the-century battle of the skyscrapers, when press barons like the owners of the *New York Times, Tribune,* and *Sun* competed only "for the sake of prestige and image." The Lipstick Building revives that robber-baronial spirit. The nickname, "lipstick," has stuck because it somehow helps, through renaming in a vernacular way, to humble an object that appears so haughty and divorced from its environment that even *Vogue* describes it as "shine without luster."

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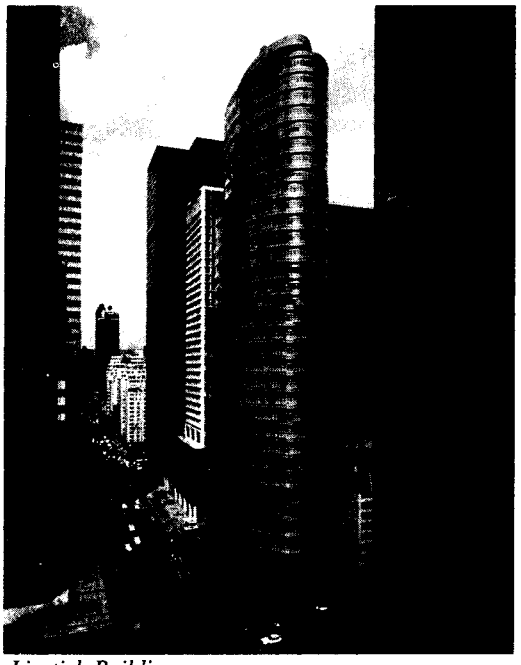
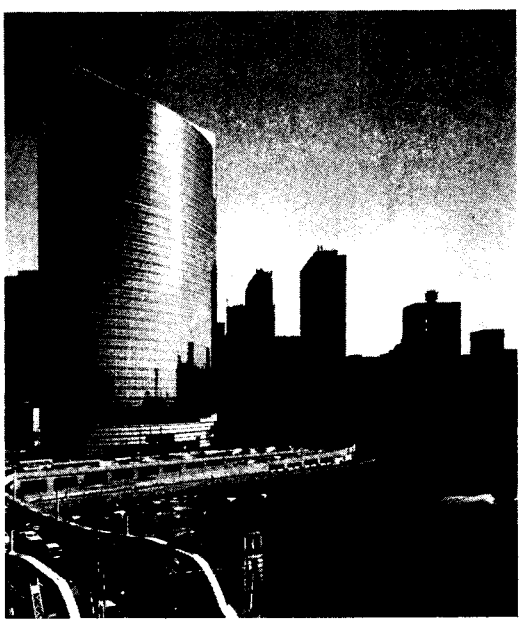


Lipstick Building

But it would take a new generation of architects to bring glitz to its peak in the 1980s. Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) has exploited the developer's appetite for glitter and chrome by providing it with an endless variety of containers. A Manhattan-based firm, KPF specializes in a slick urbanism that can be read from a distance. It has brought postmodernism's mirror, its appetite for imitating past styles, closer to the present. In addition to over scaled Palladian detailing and other stale tricks of historicism, the firm has stimulated a new interest in Art Deco, setbacks, and other formerly distinguished urban strategies from the Golden Age of the New York skyscraper. An insatiable consumer, KPF's architecture recycles urban imagery of the distant and recent past, laundering it clean. KPF, along with a venerable Chicago firm, Perkins & Will, just completed 900 North Michigan Avenue. There they provided the prime tenant, Bloomingdale's, with a cavernous atrium space, ornamented on the main floor with metallic details from the New York store.

A fascination with shimmer and shine drives KPF to mistake reflection for what Montgomery Schuyler, the nineteenth-century American architecture critic, called the "thing itself." KPF built its critically acclaimed 333 Wacker Drive in 1983. Designed for a constricted site at an elbow of the Chicago River, the building appears inventive in form and unusually sensitive to its difficult site. But this Narcissus in the city, busy with its reflection in the river and its symbiotic mirroring of surrounding buildings, is in truth a clever copy in profile of an earlier building by Harrison and Abramovitz on the Connecticut River in Hartford. The Phoenix Mutual Life Insurance Building (1960–64) is 333 Wacker Drive twenty years later. Mastery here is not concerned with authenticity, but with proliferation. Even at its best, the essence of KPF architecture is not to be embarrassed by such transpositions but to embrace them. Glitz perfected reflects and shines but has no memory.

The most gifted designer in the establishment axis is Helmut Jahn, who like Philip Johnson has roots in high modern architecture. After emigrating from Germany, Jahn was educated at Mies's old school, the Illinois Institute of Technology. Later, he apprenticed at C. F. Murphy (now Murphy/Jahn) a firm that, along with the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, solidified Chicago's reputation as postwar America's premier architectural city. Murphy's principal designers after



333 Wacker Drive

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the war, Jacques Brownson and Gene Summers, established aestheticized Miesian principles. Structure was used as a prominent design element, exemplified by McCormick Place, on which Helmut Jahn worked when he first joined the firm. Working closely with Gene Summers, Jahn explored the ornamental properties of structure. Like New York's George Washington Bridge, McCormick Place revealed to Helmut Jahn the potential of an extroverted architecture that made visible its delight in pure display.

Jahn's inspiration is mimetic, not nostalgic. Assuming a general cultural amnesia, he builds with unchallenged freedom. At the beginning of the decade, he was asked to design a speculative office building in Chicago on the corner of Monroe and Dearborn. Now the Xerox Building, it fuses high technology, a slick, enamelled aluminum-and-glass skin over a reinforced concrete structure, and a Euro-American image. The building's curved entrance evokes an unornamented version of Louis Sullivan's Carson, Pirie Scott Department Store while its massing suggests Mies's "Designs for a glass skyscraper" (1921) and Erich Mendelsohn's Schocken Stores (1928). Jahn's mimesis is sophisticated, never literal. It often involves displacement of type and context, as in this case where an anonymous office commission symbiotically recalls two celebrated commercial projects. The mirroring of forms here is not dependent on historical distance, as with most postmodernism. Rather, Jahn codes into his work references to contemporary buildings at a very different scale as he does with the State of Illinois Building (1985), which inflates the sharp-cut conical shape of Thomas Beeby's modest lakeside observatory and hollows out the core for an audacious atrium structure or simply creates a double of an existing structure with his addition to the Chicago Board of Trade (1982).

The result is that Helmut Jahn's work in the 1980s has defined the boundary between glitz and genuine innovation. In his United Airlines Terminal (1987) at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, Jahn ably transformed the well-worked vernacular style of the railroad shed into a finely integrated polychromatic mix of lights and color. But the United Airlines terminal has proven itself the exception rather than the rule for Jahn's work in the 1980s. Far more typical are forays into glitz that mark Chicago's North Western Terminal Project (1983), New York's 750 Lexington Avenue (1989) and Los Angeles's Wilshire-Westwood (1988). In each case, the architect was asked too quickly to arrive at a scheme. The one-of-a-kind syndrome leads away from analysis into an orgy of pure display. Historical quotation in oddly divergent materials replaces pure architectonic concerns. A Sullivanesque semicircular entrance attempts to break the oppressive impression of steel and glass at the North Western Terminal. But the small gesture to scale is overwhelmed by the inevitable anthropomorphic reading the building encourages. It is not the only one of Helmut Jahn's buildings that has the look of a broad-shouldered robot hulking above the street.

Jahn's recent work has included an unbuilt project for the world's tallest building for Donald Trump's grandiose Television City on Manhattan's Upper West Side and elaborate schemes throughout the world. His One Liberty Place now dominates Philadelphia's skyline, where a special high-rise zoning district was created to allow his sixty-one-story tower to be built. In the past, Philadelphia limited building height to a symbolic 491 feet, which was reserved for founder William Penn's statue on top of City Hall. Even Howe and Lescaze's Philadelphia Saving Fund Society tower (1932), the city's finest modern building, respected this traditional limit. But insensitivity to local tradition is part of glitz's international appeal. Particularity of place is not thought important as long as visitors find themselves safely in the eternal land of RICH. The lobby at One Liberty Place, with its marble walls, hanging American flag, baby grand, and palm tree, is a money vault, tucked away from the dwarfed older city outside. Helmut Jahn's "Let them eat cake" Euro-glitz has none of the frantic insecurity of Trump Tower's six-story rose-colored atrium. However, with all its sophistication the building can also be viewed as mocking the city. A famous building has been imported from another place and skinned for its image. One

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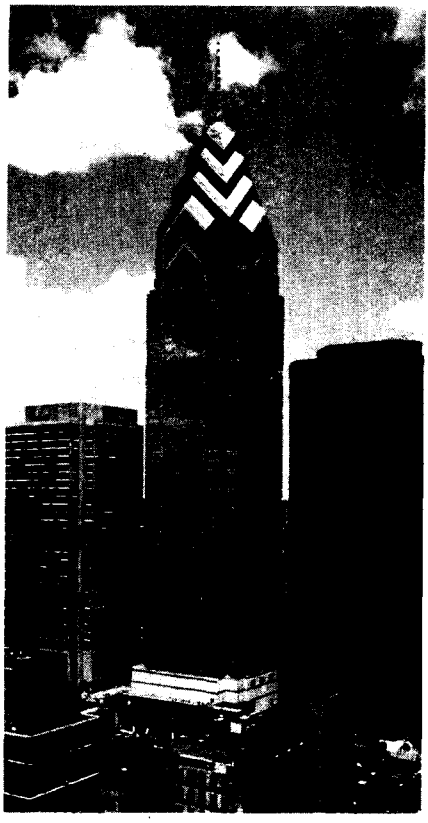
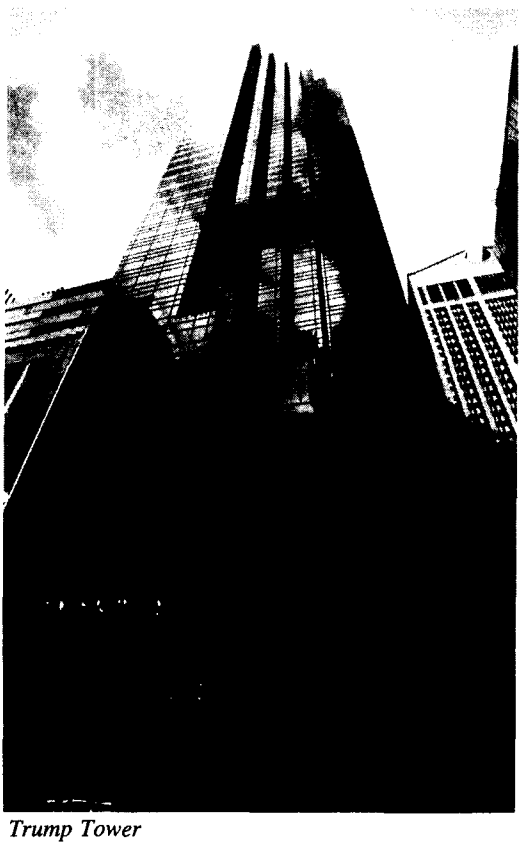


One Liberty Place



Trump Tower

Liberty Place is a contemporary version of New York's Chrysler Building, a prime case of architectural cloning that cynically implies that nothing in this time is unique or authentic.

Where Will Glitz Go?

Where are we then as the decade comes to an end? Glitz has dominated the architecture of the 1980s as the glorification of prosperity, exclusivity, and security has dominated public discourse. Politics has most recently been concerned with maintaining an image. Ronald Reagan came into office "talking tough" about opposing the Evil Empire and glorified himself as Commander and Chief in Grenada, not Moscow. The stance was all important and the context rarely questioned, as Reagan took on personas from the Gipper to liberator at Normandy. Even when he got it wrong at Bitburg, be recovered instantly. He was incapable of embarrassment.

Dominated by large corporate firms, American architecture has manifested this same kind of smugness. Nonetheless there are some signs of change. Community opposition has forced developer Mortimer Zuckerman to scale down a gargantuan skyscraper project for Columbus Circle on Manhattan's West Side. Now in its third version and second architect, the building is still far from receiving approval. Architectural criticism has also forced alterations of plans at both the Guggenheim and Whitney Museums and scrapped proposals to build some large midblock towers in Manhattan. To date, the most radical success has been the farcical dismantling of the top of the seventy-two-story Cityspire, on Seventh Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets, because it hogged eleven more feet than the city permitted.

There are other hopeful signs. Frank Gehry, 1989 recipient of the Pritzker Prize (architecture's version of the Nobel) has revived memories of a smaller scale style of practice in America that produced Frank Lloyd Wright and

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Louis Kahn, who also worked in the shadow of great corporate firms but created the conditions for an opposition architecture. Following Gehry's example, a series of younger architects—George Ranalli, Steven Holl, Tod Williams and Billie Tsien in New York, Ron Krueck in Chicago, Frank Israel, and Morphosis in Los Angeles—has moved away from glitz. In their work and interest in teaching they are trying to take architecture out of the boardroom.

The result is that a greater awareness and interest in architecture has begun to develop nationwide. There is even a new architectural hero in the comics, Mr. X. A master architect responsible for "Radiant City," X became so revolted by his work that he went underground. Resurfacing recently, he vows to "undo the damage he believes he had done . . . even if it kills him." Never sleeping, pale, ghost-like, he haunts the city trying to reverse the process he helped initiate. Nice to think so. □

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Laura Bergheim

PLUGGIES

The Closet Culture Comes of Age

More insidiously than any other decade in our history, the 1980s have delivered unto us (and into our homes) the promises of past futurists: sit back, relax, and let your fingers do the walking across the universe of simulated experience. Quietly, almost magically, the middle-class home sweet home has been transformed into an environment that now doubles as office, schoolhouse, shopping mall, health club, printshop, restaurant, even electronic bordello. Television has been born again through television preachers, teachers, endless cable channels, and do-it-yourself satellite dishes. The lowly telephone has been redefined as the conduit for dial-a-porn, Domino's Pizza, call-waiting and conference calls. Fax machines, PCs, VCRs, and CD players cast their spells on the most reluctant of technological inductees, while a mushrooming smorgasbord of byte-sized information sources continues to satisfy the appetites of hardened computer buffs.

Yuppies, once the most outwardly mobile of the upper middle class, have traded in their dancing shoes and one-night stands for sheepskin slippers and safe sex. Slides and swingsets stand empty as couches crowd with kids playing high-resolution video games. The great, electronic indoors beckons all but a stalwart few into the home technology whirlwind.

User-friendly technologies have given everyone the keystroke to the computer kingdom. When showrooms and catalogs for The Sharper Image and other elite-tech boutiques began appearing nationwide, larger and more mainstream retailers, including Radio Shack and Sears, jumped on the bandwagon. As the taste for high-tech toys trickled down to the masses, manufacturers began producing lower-priced, simplified versions of the top-of-the-line items. Entire computer systems now can be purchased for less than the cost of a single component ten years ago.

Pluggies—those who are plugged in but tuned out—are fast developing as the heirs to the yuppie. This new asocial animal is a creature of comfort and convenience, overstimulated by artificial intelligence and instant gratification, but underexposed to genuine experience and the virtues of patience. Although the Pluggie character is still fermenting, the modus operandi for a society of selectively self-sufficient shut-ins is already in place. Activities that once demanded human contact, involvement, and interaction now can be performed by a dazzling array of consumer technologies. Letters can be delivered by fax in seconds with nary a growling dog in the foyer. More information can be downloaded in an hour by computer modem than a librarian could dig up in a month. Banking now can be done via computer in most major cities, as can shopping, bill paying, travel planning, and other minor errands. People can even engage in civic activism without leaving home: citizens in Santa Monica can link their computers to city hall, electronically communicating questions and opinions on matters that once would have required a trip downtown.

Even when Pluggies interact meaningfully with those on the outside, it's often through a technological middleman: lonely Pluggies meet, make love, even marry each other via video

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dating, phone chat lines, and computer message boards—all without facing the pressures of unrealistic expectations or the threat of AIDS. The worst they can catch is a computer virus.

But why should they shun such natural human contact? The sociopolitical landscape of the 1980s holds a few clues. Early in the decade, the Reagan White House managed to erect a glittering, if shallow, facade of materialism and economic prosperity that helped camouflage the nation's unaddressed social problems. But by the mid-1980s, the Hollywood-in-Washington scene began slowly to dissolve, fading out and then refocusing to reveal the scourges of cocaine addiction, AIDS, and homelessness. America, still primed to "stay the course" with Reagan, responded by backing away in horror from its modern-day plagues, embracing a full-scale siege mentality of ethnic and economic elitism. "NIMBY" ("Not In My Back Yard") became the battle cry of neighborhoods and communities fiercely opposed to the local placement of proposed substance-abuse clinics and homeless shelters. Indeed, pressure from NIMBYs led Nancy "Just Say No" Reagan to withdraw her support at the last minute from the Nancy Reagan Drug Rehabilitation Center, which had been slated to open in California. Mrs. Reagan's sudden reversal caused many of the center's wealthy supporters to demand that their donations be returned. With such carefully tended home fires blazing away, even baby boomers are looking back to the future, settling down to remake the domestic ideal in their own image.

The greatest indicator of the new closet culture is the rapid change in the role of white-collar workers and their workplace environment. The aggravations of commuting to and from work, combined with the growing number of two-career couples now starting families, have helped make the home-based office a popular alternative to the nine-to-five rat race. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1985 some eighteen million Americans worked at home, either full-time or as a supplement to their day jobs. But by 1988, according to the National Work-At-Home Survey conducted by New York's LINK Resources, the number of home workers had jumped to about twenty-five million Americans, a 40 percent increase in only three years. The LINK survey also queried participants on their reasons for working at home: Of those who were self-employed, the largest group (24 percent) said they had set up their offices at home to start their own businesses, while nearly half of those who chose to work at home for other companies said they had done so because the home was a more productive environment.

Until Pluggies began setting up shop, the home office was seen as either the book-lined den where one paid the bills and hid out from kids and cohorts, or the lair of writers and artists in need of solitude. All that changed with the 1980s lionization of entrepreneurial stars like Steve Jobs, whose Apple Computers started a wave of high-tech equipment that was so user-friendly it jeopardized the role of the family dog. Suddenly, working at home became glamorous. New breeds of furniture and machinery began appearing in spare bedrooms and alcoves. The battered typewriter and cubby-holed desk were replaced by Scandinavian curvilinear computer stations outfitted with the latest in mini-computers, laser printers, and fax machines. Cushy old polyester deskchairs were traded in for state-of-the-art ergonomic seats and knee chairs designed (no doubt on computers) to reduce back strain during those long hours at the terminal.

This new work environment not only exudes high-tech, if spartan, good looks; it also functions tightly and efficiently. The once-necessary work of accountants and bookkeepers, researchers, secretaries, typesetters, telex operators, mailroom managers, and other support staff is now handled by myriad software programs, databases, desktop publishing systems, modems, and fax machines. Although such a set-up might have cost upward of $20,000 in the early 1980s, much of the basic hardware—a PC clone with a hard disk, monitor, and modem—now can be bought for under $1,000. Functional (if not top-notch) printers and fax machines can be had for under $1,000.

Databases systems like DIALOG and Com-

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puServe provide a central point of access to hundreds of information sources around the country. A writer working on a story about pig farming in Indonesia can log on and quickly search for related magazine and newspaper articles, doctoral dissertations, statistical abstracts, State Department reports, agricultural studies, soil maps, and practically any other resource material known. Once the information has been located, the writer can pick and chose what's appropriate, download it through the modem, and store it on disk or print it out—all within the time it might take to drive to a library with far fewer research materials.

Research isn't the only job that has been tamed by technology. Most time-consuming facets of paperwork have been all but eliminated. Fax technology has quickly replaced the overnight letter and telex as hard-copy communication. Contracts now can be read and revised, plans approved, and itineraries established within minutes rather than days. Likewise, desktop publishing has also revolutionized the way people communicate—slick publications and advertisements can be designed and reproduced using a home computer rather than paying and waiting for typesetting and paste-up.

Thanks to modern technology, the home office has come into its own during the past decade. Unfortunately, for all the benefits of efficient home employment, the very nature of the beast isolates people from their coworkers and colleagues. The level of contact with others becomes a matter of choice. Some home-based workers meet for lunch every day, just to get out of the house; but those more addicted to the insular society of the closet culture may never meet their clients or employers face to face. Although most people who work at home are either self-employed or on the staff of small firms, large organizations are now poised to start allowing employees to work at home. IBM is experimenting with flexible schedules for some workers (especially new mothers), allowing them to split their work time between home and office.

Over time, the home office can be expected to chip away at the established hierarchies and cycles of workplace structures and ethics. Where the office was once a place of social as well as work-related interaction, it may soon become merely the electronic switchyard and archival repository for home workers. With coworkers communicating by fax or modem instead of at the coffee machine or in the conference room, the spirits of teamwork or head-to-head competition that many workplaces promote may soon be a thing of the past. If home work catches on in big business, conglomerates and large corporations, already compartmentalized by virtue of their size and scope, will be further split up by their increasing number of off-site workers. Specific projects will be contracted out more frequently to independent specialists, leaving full-time employees (both in and out of the office) with the more amorphous, and perhaps less fulfilling, tasks of management and development.

Since the once-sacred concepts of company loyalty and personal commitment undoubtedly will be weakened by the lack of direct contact with the employer and coworkers, home workers simply may soak up all they need to know about a business and then quit to start one of their own. Thus, competition for clients and customers will heat up considerably amidst this breeding ground for small companies, many of which may not survive the battle.

Such faltering companies could then become buy-out fodder for the very same conglomerates the workers left behind in the first place. Such business recycling will have an intriguing impact on the way an employee moves up the corporate ladder, not to mention the ways in which product patents are enforced and corporate secrets protected.

Unions, primarily white-collar ones, will undergo a dramatic change as at-home employment increases. Unions have long fought against the concept of piecework—that is, paying employees by the piece (for instance, a nickel per shirt-sleeve sewn) rather than by the hour. But with no in-office time clock to punch or manager watching, at-home workers with untrusting bosses will undoubtedly be forced into the position of accepting just such productivity pay. Unless employers institute a universal honor system, there will be invasive, home-based monitoring systems that will justi-

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fiably raise the ire of Pluggies and will provide fodder for unions well into the next century. Another issue will be benefits or reimbursements related to the use of home equipment for office use. Once workers move back home such issues as work environment quality, child care, and commuting benefits will recede in importance.

Just as workers will be telecommuting to their offices, so will they be telecommuting to union meetings. The social aspect of local chapter gatherings will fade as national and international organizations stage meetings on screen. In the end, specializations will take the place of locals as the common denominator that unites and forms smaller groups. And the unions themselves, lacking the hands-clasped camaraderie engendered by the friendship of co-workers and local meetings, will evolve into watered down professional societies with massive data bases and electronic bulletin boards. When the group workplace is thus broken up into self-contained, single unit Pluggiedoms, the unions representing those workers will be forced to address the cries of a thousand separate complaints. With no central focus, unions will seek ways to universalize their negotiation and labor protection efforts by developing self-help computer programs to diagnose and resolve virtually any difficulty, possibly through direct negotiation with the computers of the employer. Soon, if history does indeed repeat itself, there will be management programs developed to do nothing but "bust" union programs.

The at-home office is an established fact of life for many workers, but a new twist is swiftly being added. High-tech tools now can follow their owners to the bedroom or to the BMW: laptop computers, portable fax machines, and mobile phones (the granddaddy of tech totes) are turning the home office into a movable feast of labor. Although on the surface this may sound as though it defeats the stay-at-home purpose of the closet culture, mobile technology actually promises to change the concept of home as society has defined it.

"For millions, and particularly for the 'people of the future,' home is where you find it," wrote sociologist Alvin Toffler in his 1970 bestseller, *Future Shock*. Toffler, noting the growing transiency inherent in modern lifestyles, pointed out that home could no longer be seen as a single, fixed place. Instead, he predicted, people would increasingly attach the emotional qualities of "home" to wherever they happened to be at the time. What Toffler failed to foresee was that, for Pluggies, technology itself has been molded into an intellectual shelter that overarches any physical landscape.

In the past, the home was a symbol of warmth and comfort, a place to spend leisure time and pursue hobbies. The splintering of traditional family life due to divorce, single parenthood, and unmarried coupledom, combined with the home's new status as an electronic amusement park and office, has transformed the image of home. To Pluggies the home is primarily one big enclosed electrical outlet. One need look no farther than recent fiction to find evidence of this new domestic scene: "Now they lived through machines, they were addicted to machines. . . . There were not enough plugs," David Leavitt writes in his 1988 novel, *Equal Affections,* describing the electronic dependencies of a pair of gay lawyers. Leavitt goes on to reveal that throughout the couple's house,

> The outlets were stuffed with extenders; the extenders were stuffed with extension cords; wires tangled like matted hair under desks, cabinets, beneath the sofa. Electricity hummed through the house even when everything was turned off, wires connecting to other wires, other machines. . . .

This ever-present web of cords, cables, and connectors serves as a more meaningful (if abstract) home symbol for those hardcore Pluggies who attach greater emotional significance to function than to environment. Thus, the portability of computers, fax machines, phones, television sets, CD players and other travel gadgets lets them take their "home" on the road in a very real sense.

Pluggies can wrap up their wire web and take it on planes, trains, and gondolas from Venice to Disneyland, at the same time finding shelter within the invisible, humming home of electricity that serves to distance them from the

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rigors of human relations. Pluggies on the road may be forced to deal with other passengers, desk clerks, and waiters, but once basic arrangements and details have been dispensed with, Pluggies can then retreat into their private world of bits and bytes.

Thus preserved from the anxieties of the outside world, Pluggies can move through their entire lives via a series of invisible networks. Indeed, today's Pluggies could well spawn an entire generation of self-created, self-sufficient, self-absorbed agoraphobes, confined to an electronic house of their own making. Nearly all of life's pleasures, as well as its bare necessities, now can be imported into the home at the touch of a button or through do-it-yourself kits. Children can sit down at their own starter computers (with their own mini-workstation furniture) and study most of the same subjects they learn in school. And when they get bored with their studies, the kids can always switch on an animated football game or World War I dogfight. The only way to get into trouble is to fool around with Dad's "MacPlay-mate," a computer-generated dreamgirl who persuades the user to undress her and then make love to her on-screen (this program comes complete with a panic button so an employee can trade in the graphic graphics for a fake spreadsheet in case the boss walks in).

Since man cannot live by sex alone, some restaurants in New York and Los Angeles now fax their menus daily to regular customers, who need only check off their order and fax it back for pick up or delivery later that day. To work off that rich meal, compact home exercise machines and videos (booming since Jane Fonda kicked off the aerobic tape mania in the early eighties) keep Pluggies from looking like piggies. For a more human touch, the yellow pages are filled with personal trainers who will come to a client's home or office and put her or him through the paces personally. As for inner fitness, dozens of relaxation and subliminal health tapes can be popped into the VCR for hours of serene ocean scenes interspersed with secret whispers to quit smoking and give up french fries. Even Hollywood's New Age sage is getting into the act: "Shirley MacLaine's Inner Workout" videotape ($29.95) arrived on the market in early 1989 with promises of inner peace through relaxation and "self-reduction."

If meditation doesn't make you feel better, there's a plethora of home medical kits on the market that can test for pregnancy, fertility, high blood pressure, diabetes, colon cancer and (coming soon) even AIDS. Nor are doctors the only professionals losing business to the closet culture: lawyers are being replaced by do-it-yourself divorce and will kits, CPAs are being superseded by simple accounting and tax-filing software, and psychologists are being displaced by computerized Freuds and Jungs.

Summing it all up is a system called "Prodigy." With it, users can order in groceries, read horoscopes, and exchange electronic mail with Gene Siskel, Howard Cosell, and Sylvia Porter (all of whom have columns on the network). Simplicity is the key to Prodigy. When logged on (via modem and a password), the user sees graphics depicting a city. If he wants to go shopping, he tells the computer to go to the mall, where he can "explore" several floors of shops, catalog listings, and other purchasing venues. Placing an order is as simple as pressing a button and typing in a credit card number.

Developed jointly by Sears and IBM, Prodigy is leading the race to put a computer network in every home; incredibly inexpensive by industry standards ($9.95 a month, and the phone calls are usually local), it is also the first service to dish up advertising along with information. Adding a new and prophetic twist to an old theme, a Prodigy financial network listing proclaims, "American Express: Don't Stay Home Without It."

It has not, however, been all smooth sailing. Even for the most technically accomplished Pluggie, information overload can be a threat. "In our enthusiasm to exercise our new machinery, we create unnecessary anxiety; the new-toy syndrome operates with telecommunications equipment as much as with Tinkertoys," Richard Saul Wurman writes in his 1988 book, *Information Anxiety*.

The reaction to this anxiety, Wurman says, is that people have begun to turn this

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technological overkill against its own purpose, using it to block the very communications the machines ostensibly were purchased to facilitate. "Where once we were excited by the prospect of new information and welcomed those devices, such as the telegraph, the telephone, and the radio, that brought us closer to the world, now we have begun to use technology to screen our communications," Wurman writes, noting the growing use of telephone answering machines to screen out callers rather than to take their messages. By literally pulling the plug, Pluggies can use their gadgets to shield themselves from even the most impersonal of human contacts.

The result is a technology that has actually helped turn the clock back by a century or so. Once upon a time most Americans lived in relatively rural isolation. Self-sufficiency was a necessity, not a choice as it is today. Contact beyond the family and a few neighbors was minimal because of distance and smaller population centers. But as advances in transportation and communications technology created a global community, relative distances between even the most remote towns seemed to shrink. Supermarkets, shopping malls, community colleges, and cultural centers that sprang up nationwide brought together a once disassociated population. Now we are on the verge of coming full circle: with even the simplest of errands and tasks being performed by home computers, the fabric of daily social contact will grow thin again.

On January 1, 1987, the *Washington Post*'s annual "In/Out" list proclaimed that "cocooning" (the act of cuddling up at home with loved ones and pets) was in—and partying all night was out. The new age of indoorsmanship was officially sanctioned. Soon to follow were loungewear fashions for haute cocooners and down-filled sleeping bags designed with the couch, not the campsite, in mind. By 1988, the airwaves were offering soft drink commercials depicting couples pointedly staying home for the evening and a television game show (featuring nothing but questions about television) entitled "Couch Potatoes." A jaunty 1980s label for those who sit around all day like immobile lumps of complex carbohydrates, munching junk food and flicking channels, the Couch Potato image became a high-concept marketing idea: cuddly lounge spud dolls appeared on shelves in time for the 1988 Christmas season.

The society that fled indoors under the blind, benevolent watch of the Reagan administration has now postdated its reasoning, reinstating the virtues of the tucked-away hearth and home as an excuse for shutting out the troubled world on the other side of the "Welcome" mat. Safe within their own electronic world, Pluggies can revel in their self-image as the modern, closeted embodiment of the great domestic dream—as American as microwaved apple pie and video baseball. The portrait of the happy new family at home is now complete with Dad on the word processor, Mom at the food processor, and the kids glued to their joysticks.□

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Sean Wilentz

THE TRIALS OF TELEVANGELISM

Jerry Falwell and the Enemy

In 1987, at the outset of the PTL ("Praise the Lord") scandal, the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart solemnly announced that "the gospel of Jesus Christ has never sunk to such a level as it has today." Never mind the Inquisition: it had taken Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker to drag Christianity to the very depths of depravity. Nobody could have guessed that a year later it would be the Reverend Jimmy's turn to cry, once his sexual carryings-on came to light. We may never know if Swaggart's denunciation of the Bakkers projected his still-secret guilt upon a pair of vulnerable rivals. What is clear is that Swaggart's disgrace (and the Bakkers'), along with Pat Robertson's cranky presidential crusade in 1988, made a mockery of what was supposed to be the great awakening of conservative evangelicalism. Rarely in modern times has a movement of such reputed magnitude self-destructed so suddenly.

Yet, as with everything connected to evangelical politics, appearances were deceiving. Although the evangelical right failed to turn itself into a successful Christian party (or fully convert the GOP), it nonetheless changed the nation's cultural and political life during the 1980s. The key to this change lies in the career of Jerry Falwell. Before he disbanded the Moral Majority and beat a strategic retreat to his church and university in Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell gave the country a sense of what it would be like to have an American mullah. During most of the Reagan years, Falwell seemed to be everywhere at once—standing up for Star Wars, denouncing sodomy, fighting secular humanism, and urging patriotic Americans to buy all the Kruggerands they could afford.

Born in 1933 to a pious, dutiful homemaker and a successful Lynchburg bootlegger-businessman ruined by drink, Falwell was less the dour backwoods Bible thumper than a middle-class striver. He studied for two years to become an engineer before receiving God's call and transferring to a fundamentalist Bible college. Although loyal to fundamentalist doctrine, he also encouraged his congregation to compete successfully in the race of life. "Lessons in worldly success," Frances FitzGerald has called his early sermons, "how-to-do-it manuals in the mainstream tradition of Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale."

Falwell's Lynchburg congregation consisted not of the amorphous rural classes, so commonly invoked as the mainstay of postwar fundamentalism, but of city people, many of them on the way up, with hardscrabble rural backgrounds. They had come to Lynchburg with the arrival of major national corporations during the 1950s, and they formed the boundary of a rapidly growing middle class. With his methods of "saturation evangelism"—equal parts Christian stewardship and relentless door-to-door salesmanship—Falwell reached out to these people and built his Thomas Road Baptist Church into one of the largest "super churches" in the nation. By the early 1970s it had a splendid new sanctuary, a Christian academy and elementary school, a syndicated television ministry, a rehabilitation center for

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alcoholics, and a membership of thousands. If not quite of the mainstream secular world, Falwell and his congregation were certainly in it in a way their parents and grandparents never were.

The trouble was, the world was rapidly changing in ways that deeply wounded fundamentalist sensibilities. Just as they began to climb out from behind the walls of social inferiority and cultural isolation, fundamentalists felt attacked on all sides. For many, the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions banning prayer in public schools were the first of these troubling changes. For Falwell, the decisive challenge was the civil rights movement.

In 1965, at the time of the Selma marches, Falwell used his pulpit to blast activist clergymen, especially Martin Luther King, Jr., for getting mixed up in politics and ignoring their duties as servants of Jesus Christ. Four months later, when a band of civil rights demonstrators targeted his church for nonviolent protests, they were evicted and arrested. Twenty years later, Falwell called these events a personal turning point: first, because they began a spiritual journey that led him to reject his racism (he now calls the civil rights workers of the 1960s "courageous"); second, because they taught him that religion and politics need not be kept separate. But in the 1960s no such calming perspective was possible. Fundamentalists like Falwell, who believed in a doctrine of pietistic withdrawal, had their backs to the wall. Their continued abstention from politics meant acquiescing to the elimination of structures of white supremacy that were deeply embedded in Southern fundamentalist life. As it happened, the crisis atmosphere abated in Lynchburg over the next few years. Falwell and his congregation found ways to make their peace with civil rights while preserving their church as an overwhelmingly white community.

But by the 1970s the sense of frustration and panic returned. Falwell has cited the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling as his moment of awakening. So too for others who wound up in the Moral Majority. From that moment on, opposition to abortion became a key element in the rise of evangelical political fervor. Abortion did not stand alone, however. Other developments also fed the simmering revolt. There was the duplicity of Watergate, the disgrace of America's defeat in Vietnam, the waning of patriotic anticommunism, the gay rights movement, Jimmy Carter's "betrayal" of his evangelical heritage once in office, and a shaky economy, as seen in the ascendency of OPEC.

Earlier generations of fundamentalists might have been able to distance themselves from such changes, shrug their shoulders, and wait for the Second Coming. But Falwell and untold thousands were already too much in the world for that. Every day they witnessed horrifying spectacles of libertinism, permissiveness, and disorder. Unless something was done, "the Enemy"—Falwell's term for the forces of Satan—would destroy America and prevent it from being the providential nation that would help usher in the millennium.

Television became the critical instrument in this perception of the world, and in Falwell's hands it would also be the critical instrument in rallying the faithful. At the outset, what became known as televangelism was a natural continuation of the older evangelical radio ministries (one of which, Charles Fuller's "Old Fashioned Revival Hour," Falwell credits for his conversion). Emboldened by a 1960 FCC directive allowing paid religious broadcasts to be considered part of the public-service programming required of all affiliates, Falwell and other ministers expanded their outreach, taking advantage of the latest breakthroughs in video technology. By 1971 more than three hundred stations carried Falwell's services from Thomas Road Baptist Church.

There were, of course, problems with this success. A television ministry threatened to undercut the fiercely independent communal autonomy that had long been a pillar of American evangelical Protestantism. An electronic church whose "congregants" tuned in to Falwell was a financial threat to local churches. It might even undermine the traditional subordination of a preacher to his own congregation. A successful television preacher could have a huge audience and at the same time minimal pastoral obligations. If he chose, he could

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simply turn church government over to the little oligarchy surrounding him.

Better than most, Falwell was able to finesse these problems. He did, after all, have his Thomas Road Church (administered by a close-knit group of local advisers). He approached religion, including televised religion, as a growth industry with room for everyone. On the one occasion when his pastoral leadership and personal integrity came under serious question—a 1973 SEC investigation involving improper bond issues—Falwell was able to plead inexperience and save face. Rarely, however, was it necessary for him to make excuses. He quickly learned to apply his masterful door-to-door hucksterism to the airwaves, raising millions of dollars while cultivating an appealing image.

The image was crucial. Although viewed by liberals as a loudmouth bullyboy, Falwell came as close as someone in the conservative fundamentalist fold could to a generic pan-Protestantism. He was most emphatically not a charismatic or holiness ranter. There was no faith healing or talking in tongues at Thomas Road Baptist. In his tasteful, postmodern colonial church, Falwell rarely raised his voice for long. His delivery, if not particularly stirring, was recognizably avuncular and down-to-earth. The whole operation strove for a touch of class. Aware of the importance of tradition in his native Virginia, Falwell even modeled his church's buildings on Thomas Jefferson's architectural designs. There was something safe and reassuring about his broadcasts. To an uninitiated viewer, it all might have looked like nothing more than, well . . . church. One had to listen awhile to catch Falwell's message.

At the heart of the nation's problems, Falwell declared—the main cause of America's loss of prestige, the decline of patriotism, and the triumph of pervasive liberalism—was a moral rot that derived from the breakdown of sexual rules and of the "traditional family." It was not the first time that American religion and politics had become entangled with profound changes in sexual norms. The evangelical outbursts of the 1820s and 1830s helped legitimate the very model of bourgeois family life and domestic bliss that Falwell and others mythologize as the biblically inspired nuclear unit established for eternity. The fundamentalist uprisings of the 1920s involved a reaction against the New Woman and against the alleged effeminacy of the liberal, modern man whom Billy Sunday called "a wishy-washy sissified sort of galoot that let everybody make a doormat out of him."

Falwell tapped into the deeply sexualized anxieties that followed from the social upheavals of the last twenty years. These anxieties didn't just involve fears of androgyny and male lust; they entailed elemental distinctions between order and chaos, cleanliness and pollution. For Falwell and other fundamentalists, as well as millions of Americans, the qualities of maleness and femaleness are not malleable. They are divinely ordered essences, "intimately woven," as Falwell wrote in 1980, "in the overall fabric of personality."

Fully mature persons are either completely masculine or completely feminine, qualities that Falwell attaches to his long-suffering mother and his tragically doomed father, as well as to his own "Christian marriage." At Thomas Road Baptist, these distinctions are reinforced less in the liturgy (though Falwell always projects a beefy ex-jock presence) than in the visual imagery of Falwell's sermons. On one occasion, Falwell instructed his congregation to reject the prevailing depiction of Jesus Christ as a meek, diaphanous hippie-type with long hair and a billowing robe: "Christ wasn't effeminate. . . . The man who lived on this earth was a man with muscles. . . . Christ was a he-man!"

Yet everywhere they looked in the late 1960s and 1970s, Falwell and his congregation saw a mainstream culture hell-bent on androgyny (and with it the destruction of the American family and the loss of national virility). Worse still, they saw politicians going along with it all. One day the sissified galoots in Washington were proposing constitutional amendments that would force Christian women to be drafted for combat duty. The next day they were touting legislation that would make homosexuals a

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legally protected minority, thereby thrusting perverts on unwilling Christian employers and school boards.

Male lust, the flip side of androgyny, showed its face everywhere from the porno houses to the divorce courts. More important, the calls for equality by ERA feminists, prochoice groups, and other proponents of women's rights promised to let men evade their responsibilities, prey upon women's bodies, and deny women the legal and moral protections they deserved. A hideous vision unfolded before fundamentalists' eyes: sexual and mental abuse of women and children, babies slain in their mothers' wombs—all in the name of sexual freedoms that did more to oppress women than to liberate them.

By the end of the 1970s, the cumulative effects of fundamentalism's encounters with the postwar world had raised the possibility of launching a conservative Christian crusade around moral and sexual issues unlike any seen for half a century. It took secular right-wing organizers like Paul Weyrich to suggest the contours (and the name) for the Moral Majority and complete Falwell's entry into politics. But Falwell also proved himself an enormously capable organizer.

Very quickly the Moral Majority, along with its sibling organizations the Christian Voice and the Religious Roundtable, attracted attention, raised planeloads of money, and added conservative Protestants to the election rolls. Exact figures are hard to come by, but estimates put the number of voters registered by the Moral Majority and the other religious groups at two million. The new vote was solidly behind the man who endorsed the evangelical revolt, Ronald Reagan. In 1976 two-thirds of the combined evangelical-fundamentalist vote went to the born-again Jimmy Carter. Eight years later, the Reagan-Bush ticket garnered an astounding 81 percent.

The payback for this loyalty was a combination of rhetorical support for the fundamentalist cause and the appointment of friendly federal officials, especially in the courts. It will take future historians to determine just how much of a role Falwell and his friends played in Reagan appointments to the bench, but by the end of the 1980s, they certainly had every reason to be pleased with the results.

Within the churches, meanwhile, Falwell's activities bolstered the fundamentalists' efforts to recapture the leadership of various major fellowships. The most dramatic and wrenching shift came within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant fellowship in the United States. By 1980 fundamentalist conservatives, spearheaded by Bailey Smith, had taken command of the SBC's national offices and done all they could to root out moderate influences. Fundamentalist and charismatic precepts also began to seep into mainline churches and the popular culture. By mid-decade it was common for rock-ribbed Presbyterians to sing evangelical hymns (not in the approved hymnal), to touch and squeeze each other, to attend workshops on *glossolalia*. Even athletics were now affected by religion. It seemed impossible to watch a sporting event without hearing the winner credit his or her victory to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Falwell's rise also contributed to the literal-minded, absolutist temper that permeated public discussion in the 1980s. We must be careful here about grouping him with others who came on the public scene with moral and cultural prescriptions. The Moral Majority emerged from a very different part of the forest than the pop Platonism of Allan Bloom or the curdled feminism of Women Against Pornography. Where they converged was in their willingness to take words or symbols (the Bible, long hair, dirty pictures) as a transparent text with a meaning that would impel people to act, either for good or ill. America, awash in bad symbols, had to exorcize the devil behind them—be he Nietzsche, Larry Flynt, or Satan himself—and bring back good standards and good symbols. By the mid-1980s American discourse was full of in-your-face affirmations about duty, flag, and family—no questions asked.

But as far as consolidating a national political base and changing America's views on other important issues, Falwell's achievement is much cloudier. In 1982, despite some mild boasts by Falwell, the religious right made little difference in the congressional vote nation-

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wide. In some states Moral Majority chapters gained control of seats on local school boards and Republican committees, but generally they failed to capture the political machinery. By 1985 candidates discovered that direct endorsement by political evangelicals could lead to a net loss in votes. On the national level the Reagan White House kept up its rhetorical support of the Moral Majority (and made the necessary appointments), but fairly quickly backed away from the evangelical legislative program.

Explanations abound for why the Moral Majority so soon reached the limits of its power. Most of these center on specific aspects of Falwell's fundamentalist background—which, for all his aspirations to ecumenicism, he could never quite shake. His mounting belligerence, for example, shaped as it was by his Manichean faith, violated what the sociologist James Davison Hunter calls an "ethic of civility" in American politics, a shared unspoken scruple that compels people not only to tolerate others' beliefs but to be tolerable to others. In Falwell's case his television mask turned him into the kind of "hot" personality that leaves the public cold.

The Moral Majority's organizational structure also displayed some of the weaknesses of Falwell's fundamentalist background. Although Falwell claimed that his organization represented a broad spectrum of conservative Protestants, Jews, and Roman Catholics, its foundations were far narrower. In actuality the whole operation resembled a national fundamentalist parachurch with its base in the local congregations. This organization helped the group grow quickly (by 1981 there were an estimated 400,000 Moral Majoritarians), but it also hindered any coordinated effort on political issues outside of presidential elections. It disguised the unevenness of the Moral Majority's development state by state, all but ensuring that Falwell would be continually embarrassed by the outrageousness of an independent spokesman or chapter.

The notion that there really was an absolute moral majority in the country that thought the same way Falwell did and was ready to fight for its vision also turned out to be a myth. Although polls showed that a large number of Americans—perhaps one-third—said they supported all of Falwell's key positions on homosexuality, school prayer, abortion, and the "traditional family," they also showed that the rest held to more liberal positions. Even evangelical Christians hardly formed a moral and political bloc. As Falwell himself admitted, some of the sharpest attacks on him came from such bastions of determined ultrafundamentalist separatism as the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship and Bob Jones University.

In the end, though, it was Falwell's politics that evoked the most negative reactions—the widespread suspicion, even among conservative believers, that he and the evangelical right represented a dark, antidemocratic strain in modern American politics. Being called a fascist, a bigot, and a warmonger clearly stung Falwell, and he has devoted a good deal of energy to settling scores with the liberal press for allegedly misrepresenting his views. No doubt he was prejudged in some quarters. But his political pronouncements did often slide off the edge of Christian moralism, "free enterprise" economics, and hard-line anticommunism into tropes reminiscent of the right-wing zealots of the 1930s and the McCarthyites of the 1950s. The irony is that some of his nastiest rhetoric accompanied his early efforts to make his movement more pluralistic.

When Falwell began his crusade, he underestimated the importance of grounding it in one of the great shibboleths of postwar American life—the "Judeo-Christian tradition" that supposedly forms the nation's ethical foundation. As Mark Silk detailed in an illuminating little book, *Spiritual Politics,* Judeo-Christianity emerged after 1945 as the latest in a series of American adhesional faiths—an attempt to provide everyone with a common religious cause and a "quasi-spiritual alliance to the religiously impartial state." Falwell was not blind to such ecumenicism. Early on, he said nice things about Israel, which, to many people's surprise, turned out to be perfectly consistent with his fundamentalist beliefs. (Israel plays a significant and heroic role in

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fundamentalist eschatology, as derived from the Book of Ezekiel.) But like other fundamentalists, Falwell still believed America had been founded "by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation."

A storm of protest, particularly from Jews, forced Falwell to reshape himself into an unswerving advocate of Judeo-Christian pluralism. But who then was "the Enemy"? Back in the 1950s both liberal and conservative Judeo-Christians thought they knew the answer. "The Enemy" was godless totalitarianism, specifically international communism, including its American adherents and fellow travelers. By the 1980s, however, domestic anticommunism was an inauspicious rallying point for building a broad consensus on moral conservatism. So the religious began talking about a new enemy—secular humanism.

Until 1970, only a few thousand Americans had even heard of the secular humanists, that hearty little band of atheists and world-government types. Conservatives might have missed them altogether if Justice Hugo Black, in a celebrated 1961 decision, hadn't mentioned secular humanism, along with Buddhism, Taoism, and Ethical Culture, as one of several atheistic religions to be guaranteed full First Amendment rights. By 1980 fundamentalists like Falwell's colleague Tim LaHaye had picked up the term and invested it with conspiratorial powers—the many-horned beast of modern liberalism, with its pornography, homosexuality, feminism, and big government. Here a line could be drawn, not between Christian and non-Christian, but between Judeo-Christianity and "the Enemy," secular humanism. And here a new political line could also be drawn between the Judeo-Christians who acknowledged that the United States had been founded on Holy Writ and the heathen who did not.

The invention of secular humanism helped Falwell and the Moral Majority open lines of communication to politically important conservative and neoconservative Jews. But demonizing secular humanism also had disastrous costs. The term was so capacious as to suggest that everyone from Thomas Jefferson to Madonna shared the same basic beliefs. Most of secular humanism's presumed tenets—the vaunting of personal freedom, the toleration of different personal beliefs—were so deeply enshrined in American culture that it was hard for most Americans to see where they ran afoul of basic American principles. The actions undertaken by pious conservatives to uproot secular humanism in the schools—notably the suit that led to a 1987 decision barring forty-four "secular humanist" texts from Alabama public schools—seemed at odds with Falwell's announced opposition to censorship. Such actions also raised a dilemma: If conservative evangelicals could remove works of secular humanism from public institutions, what was to stop secular humanists from demanding the exclusion of Judeo-Christian materials as prejudicial to *their* religion?

The more Falwell and his allies tried to build a coalition atop their fundamentalist following, the more they confirmed that they were out of touch with the prevailing ideas about democracy. In 1984 the historian Martin Marty concluded that the fundamentalists could succeed on their own terms only in the event of an utter political and economic collapse, leading to "a state religion, compulsory in character, authoritarian in tone, and 'traditional' in outlook." How much of this Falwell understood at the time is unclear. In the mid-1980s, he did, however, begin to soften his public posture.

In 1980, for example, Falwell appeared sympathetic to banning all homosexuals from public-school teaching, but later he insisted he would not abridge their right to teach "as long as they don't use the classroom to promote homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle." Similarly, he kept repeating that abortion is murder but added that abortions are permissible in cases of rape or incest. Falwell even took pride in the fact that his Liberty University trained men and women for professional careers, thus raising the question of what his idea of the "traditional" family and the "traditional" wife now meant.

During Reagan's second term Falwell could still launch into fire-and-brimstone oratory. "Satan had mobilized his own forces," he reflected in his 1987 autobiography, "to

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destroy America by negating the Judeo-Christian ethic." But the jeremiads now came in passing. So beholden to White House friends had Falwell become that well before the 1988 campaign, he endorsed George Bush, a man who had waffled on the abortion issue and who, for all his protestations about being born again, couldn't seem to get straight the simplest biblical reference. The result is a situation that has enraged fundamentalist purists, who in 1988 cast their lot with Pat Robertson's campaign.

Falwell and his followers are in some ways better off than they were when he began the Moral Majority. Although mired in continuing controversy—above all, the PTL fiasco—Falwell ended the decade with more dignity than virtually all the other high-profile televangelists. He is now free to devote himself to institution building (in particular to his dream of turning Liberty University into a fundamentalist Notre Dame), knowing that the new conservative Supreme Court may yet overturn *Roe v. Wade* and that he has secured for fundamentalist believers a national respectability that was unimaginable twenty years ago.

But he has failed to secure the long-term political initiative. In 1989, politicians who had supported Falwellian and New Right positions on abortion stammered and stumbled, surprised by the public's reaction to the *Webster* decision. Growing portions of the Republican party now predict a political disaster unless the party finally loses its identification with the religious right.

It is one thing to affect the nation's cultural tone, quite another to translate that into enduring political power. Jerry Falwell had to learn this lesson the hard way. While he was learning it, he contributed mightily to the political dreariness of the Reaganite Gilded Age and won his share of victories. We are only beginning to recover. □

To Our Contributors:

A few suggestions:

(1) Be sure to keep a copy of your ms—the mails aren't always reliable. And please remember that we can't return articles unless they're accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

(2) Please don't write to ask whether we're interested in such and such an article—it makes for useless correspondence. Look at our last few issues to see if your idea fits in. Or take a chance and send us your article.

(3) Type your ms *double-spaced*, with *wide* margins. Check all your figures, dates, names, etc.—they're the author's responsibility. No dot matrix submissions, *please*.

(4) Notes and footnotes should also be typed double-spaced, on a *separate* sheet. As we're not an academic journal, we prefer that they, wherever possible, be dropped altogether or worked into the text.

(5) We're usually quick in giving editorial decisions. If there's a delay, it's because a few editors are reading your article.

(6) Please bear with us—we have accumulated quite a backlog of material, and you may have to wait for a few issues before you see your article in print.

THE EDITORS □

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Josephine Hendin

A MATERIAL DIFFERENCE

Notes on the Newness of 1980s Fiction

The rich diversity of American fiction has always made newness difficult to characterize. But the 1980s have seen not only the arrival of fresh work by writers who have long established that diversity, but also the fracturing of literary culture along quasipolitical lines: the rise of a multi-ethnic literature encompassing the work of Chinese-Americans, Indians, African-Americans, and European ethnics, a growing gay literature, and new additions to feminist fiction. Powerful novels of Vietnam and its aftermath, many by combat veterans, have added to the cultural ferment. Yet all these often "radical" voices do not so much signal what has changed as serve the traditional end of extending our fiction's longstanding concern with the drama of marginal man beating at the doors of society. The literary revolution of the eighties has erupted in a fiction of those who have already gained entry.

Perhaps nothing reveals what has changed more than the transformation of those heroes and anti-heroes propelled toward mythic stature by an avid college market. The youthcult heroes of one period are made obsolete by those of another. Reflecting the aspirations and anxieties of coming-of-age, cult heroes dramatize the ethos of the day. The sweet brotherliness of Holden Caulfield in recoil from adulthood reflected the 1950s belief in authenticity, innocence, and family as bulwarks against the crassness of the social world. The sexual freedom of Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land,* whose Martian hero teaches the benefits of nonverbal communication, communal life, and abandoning possessive jealousy, reflected a 1960s rejection of competitive, acquisitive America. An attack on authority and authoritarianism figured in the feminist assault on the double standard, fueling mass market bestsellers of the 1970s, from *Fear of Flying* by Erica Jong to the ambitiously belletristic novel of Francine Duplessix Gray, *Lovers and Tyrants*. But the comparable fiction of the 1980s seems to be giving up the counterculture attack on adulthood, authority, and repression. There is in progress a quiet but sharp recoil from the concepts of self and society, from the quest for authentic emotion, from the visions of individualism and possibility that have been animating forces in our literature. In the 1980s we encounter the new Self in its most extreme form: the Hero as Nostril.

In Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City,* he lives, or rather, inhales in a spiritual confusion in which day and night are confounded:

> The night has already turned on that imperceptible pivot where two A.M. changes to six A.M. You know this moment has come and gone, but you are not yet willing to concede that you have crossed the line beyond which all is gratuitous damage and the palsy of unravelled nerve endings. Somewhere back there you could have cut your losses, but you rode past that moment on a comet trail of white powder and now you are trying to hang on to the rush. Your brain at this moment is composed of brigades of tiny Bolivian soldiers. They are tired and muddy from their long march through the night. There are holes in their boots and they are hungry. They need to be fed. They need the Bolivian Marching Powder.

The Hero as Nostril is nose without sense, an inhaling mechanism without the power to smell. His habitat is the toilet stall of an

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expensive restaurant or an *in* disco, for, together with cocaine, he inhales status sites and brand names. His distraught and destroyed senses, mirrored in McInerney's often impressive surreal style and speed-blurred descriptions, are incredibly precise at conveying name-brand identification. The Nostril is determined to inhale only the best.

McInerney has produced a distinctive literary effort: the compression of the novel of manners into an equivalent of upscale ads. In language there is a comparable constriction: the linguistic quest for T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative" is flattened into an exploitation of objects. There is no correlating link of attendant emotion or depth. His hero, who works as a fact-checker at a thinly disguised version of the *New Yorker,* considers himself vastly superior to the girl at the bar who believes the words "decadence and Dexedrine are the high points of the language of Kings James and Lear." He himself is a man who knows the titles of the best works: "*As I Lay Dying, Under the Volcano, Anna Karenina, Being and Time, The Brothers Karamazov,*" even if he has kept himself innocent of their contents. The title is sign supreme, the label whose possession is meant to convey class.

In style and modes of characterization, the youthcult fiction of the 1980s is a fiction not of insurgency, but of cultural collaboration. What stands out is an assimilation, to the point of wholesale adoption, of advertising culture. Labels, name brands, surface signs have become the sole social referents and methods of character definition. McInerney's characterization of a man of literary sensibility is effected not through a representation of consciousness, but by the ownership of unread books, contempt for the underyuppie class, and the ability to give such imaginative names to cocaine as "Bolivian Marching Powder." What motivates the Nostril-hero is obscure; he has too little feeling for the gradual and now final withdrawal of his wife, a fashion model and perfect label-wearer. In a belated effort at explaining what drives his hero, when the book is nearly over, McInerney introduces his mother who, near death, wishes she could have lived the way he does. Not even a dying mother runs deep.

Bright Lights, Big City was not simply a successful novel. It was a publishing phenomenon. Produced as a paperback original in Random House's Vintage Contemporaries line, it was widely and enthusiastically reviewed, a first novel that rapidly sold out its first printing and justified the "NATIONAL BESTSELLER" emblazoned on its cover along with that other label of distinction, "MAJOR MOTION PICTURE." Starring Michael J. Fox as the nose who knows, the film had the dazzling surfaces of the novel but not its ability to reflect a stream of consciousness that is itself filled with objects. Hailed by the *Playboy* reviewer as a "*Catcher in the Rye* for the MBA set," the novel's success underscored how aptly its talented twenty-nine-year-old author, in capturing a contemporary hero, had understood the culture's changing values and equation of materialism with the substance of being.

In this literature, character is entirely the product of acts of appropriation indistinguishable from buying. Serial purchases, episodic peaks and lows before scoring, make shopping the ultimate human act. Buying coke is the model for all experience: the purchase of self, the acquisition of other people.

The youthcult fiction of the 1980s differs from any we have encountered before. Most of the fiction that has appealed to college students has involved a sense of social or generational conflict or advocacy of a hedonistic, experiential ethic at variance with the competitive work ethic of American culture. The youthcult novels of the 1980s reflect an enormous shift.

Rooted in the culture of acquisition, Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* has an enraptured following among high school and college students. *Less Than Zero* hit national bestsellerdom and major motion picturehood in a film starring teen idol Andrew McCarthy. Ellis, barely into his twenties when the novel was published, was, like McInerney, hailed for producing "an updated *Catcher in the Rye*." And yet no one in his novel would know the meaning of Holden Caulfield's favorite pejorative, "phony."

For the eighteen-year-old hero of *Less Than Zero*, advertising posters mounted above his

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bed define his crisis of faith and emotional disconnections:

> It's the promotional poster for an old Elvis Costello record. Elvis looks past me, with this wry, ironic smile on his lips, staring out the window. The word "Trust" hovering over his head, and his sunglasses, one lens red, the other blue, pushed down past the ridge of his nose so that you can see his eyes, which are slightly off center. The eyes don't look at me, though. They only look at whoever's standing by the window, but I'm too tired to get up and stand by the window.

Even old friends, the boys our hero went to high school with, have themselves become marketable objects inspiring one thought: Are they for sale? In this novel, the answer is usually yes. Virtually all are male models or prostitutes or both, who define themselves by their resemblance to David Bowie, their appearance on the cover or in the pages of *International Male* ("No nudes, just Speedos"), and by the singers they listen to. They go to college—UCLA or USC—and one even possesses Cliff's Notes to *As I Lay Dying*. They appear to have majored in the names of rock singers.

Ellis uses the names of rock groups to define self. Heavy metal? Soft rock? You are, in effect, who and what you hear. His characters have spent so much time listening to the Eagles, Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, and Killer Pussy that they have been rendered inarticulate. Ellis offers as a meaningful *cri de coeur* the ambiguous opening line of the novel: "People are afraid to merge on freeways in Los Angeles," spoken by a girl picking our hero up at the airport. In the light of the novel, it may refer more persuasively to traffic patterns at freeway entry points than to missed emotional rapport. The "force" of such emotional disconnection is withstood by the hero, by turning on MTV and wishing for a Valium. Passive consumption of rock, television, films, tranquilizers, and cocaine defines the world of the novel. Bleeding nostrils and tranquilized visions mark its emotional range. What distinguishes its vision of youth is primarily an enormous enervation on and off cocaine.

The youth culture fiction of the 1980s has virtually eliminated the conflict of generations. In *Bright Lights, Big City*, parents are dead or absent, and older women are of indeterminate age. Home for Christmas break in Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, the Nostril as affluent young Californian finds neither a constraining nor loving family, nor one in which there is a difference in values between parents and children. Parents are busy popping pills; fathers get face lifts and take their young homosexual lovers to family parties; mothers drink too much, little sisters easily displace mother's voice with Killer Pussy. Drinking white wine, the Nostril's mother

> tries to smile when she asks me what I want for Christmas. I'm surprised at how much effort it takes to raise my head up and look at her.
>
> "Nothing," I say.
>
> "You look unhappy," she says real suddenly.
>
> "I'm not," I tell her.
>
> "You look unhappy," she says, more quietly this time. She touches her hair, bleached, blondish, again.
>
> "You do too," I say, hoping that she won't say anything else.
>
> She doesn't say anything else, until she's finished her third glass of wine and poured her fourth.

So much for Mom.

The young man of the 1980s is supposed to be infatuated with making money. But these youthcult novels reflect no such interest. The fathers of *Less Than Zero* differ from their sons in that they have been able to accumulate in the entertainment business enough to keep their children in cocaine and BMWs and to buy young men as lovers. Their sons have only contempt for their fathers' checkwriting abilities and no interest in finance. They know no modes of making money other than male prostitution, modeling, and drug dealing. Ellis's hero hires out as a voyeur while his friend turns tricks for a man who, Hollywood style, enjoys an audience most. In past youthcult fiction one found contempt for the treatment of sexuality as a commodity and for the phoniness of superficial looks, but in Ellis's the intertwined themes of sex, money, and voyeurism are celebrated as a descent to wallow in, disabusing the reader of literary

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expectations of youthful idealism, social criticism, or even physical pleasure. The body here is something to sell or see, not enjoy.

Sexuality has been the staple of mass youthcult fiction, reflected in fantasies of joy and freedom and in the pursuit of new sensations. Although our hero is bisexual, the likelihood of his waking up with either a man or woman does not multiply his fun. His most frequent contacts are with men and his descriptions of desired bodies are largely those of men. Yet with both men and women, the Nostril's experiences are rather like standing on line at the Motor Vehicle Bureau. It is only in the description of mutilated or exploited youngsters that some pathos emerges as our hero feels kinship with both male and female sexual victims. The definition of sexual worth alternates between excellence in the skin trade and, on the dark side, the capacity to eroticize exploitation and death.

Death is just another scene. No longer to be lamented, abhorred, or transcended, death is to be relished either as a spectacle or a justification for emptiness. In *Less Than Zero* all violence has been eroticized as pornography. At the close of the novel Ellis includes a scene of a group of beautifully built young men in a Malibu beach house watching a $15,000 snuff movie in which two adolescents are violated by a huge man who later castrates the boy and mutilates the girl. The film was of something real, the castration could not have been faked, someone says. They are excited; the high cost of the film seems additional proof that they have seen two actual murders. Later, Ellis throws in an anecdote about a Stanford student who gave a party in Rancho Mirage culminating in the repeated rape, mutilation, and murder of a girl whose throat "had been slit and her breasts had been cut off and someone had stuck candles where they used to be. Her body had been found at the Sun Air Drive-In hanging upside down from the swing set."

Less Than Zero has more dead and sexually mutilated young people than any novel I can remember that was not explicitly about war. Even Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, a milestone in the literature of disgust, developed its visions of sexual horror in terms that balanced physical pain with characterizations yielding a sense of psychological terror. But the superficial characterization employed here substitutes a rising body count for accumulated meaning. The expensive snuff movie reveals a culture of acquisition carried to an extreme in the notion that death and mutilation are highs for sale.

The moral sense is not entirely absent, but it might as well be in this fiction in which the enduring relationship is between the Nostril and his coke supplier. Ellis's Rip is not only a pusher but is also into violating innocence. Visiting Rip, our hero sees a naked twelve-year-old girl ("She goes to Corvalis"). "Her legs are spread and tied to the bedposts and her arms are tied above her head. Her cunt is all rashed and looks dry and I can see that it's been shaved. She keeps moaning and murmuring words and moving her head from side to side, her eyes half-closed. Someone's put a lot of makeup on her, clumsily, and she keeps licking her lips, her tongue drags slowly, repeatedly across them." She is drugged to the hilt (See, it doesn't hurt!) and about to be gangbanged in various ways by the three young men in the room who appear to have replaced film porn with a live act. To express his outrage, our hero asks Rip, "Why?" Rip replies the equivalent of why not: "If you want something, you have the right to take it. If you want to do something, you have the right to do it." Mulling this over, our Nostril walks out to powder his nose or, more precisely, to snort his newly purchased cocaine.

Is the Hero-as-Nostril only the aberrant creation of under-thirty writers who have come of age in the era of cocaine? The condition described in extreme ways in these novels cannot be dismissed so easily, partly because it differs in degree but not in kind from the worldview of many younger writers who do not deal with cocaine, but instead have tried to write about personal life. According to author David Leavitt, writing as the voice of the under-thirty literary generation in "New Voices and Old Values" in the *New York Times Book Review* of May 12, 1985, they have all "in general limited themselves to the short story, a form they seem to find appropriate to the age of

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shortened attention spans, fractured marriages and splintering families in which they grew up."

This youth fiction of personal life has been criticized for being insufficiently true to individual differences and for accepting commercially viable, collectivized notions of self. Bruce Bawer, in a pejoratively titled essay, "The Literary Brat Pack," accuses Leavitt, Elizabeth Tallent, Meg Wolitzer, Marian Thurm, Peter Cameron, and others of writing "exactly alike," of having forsaken an original voice to buy the modish sound purveyed to them by writing programs. Their collective, contrived voice is "especially big on the details surrounding 'relationships' . . . the set decorations—the bags of groceries, the copies of *GQ* and *People* . . . [that] tend, time and again to overwhelm the frail narratives." At fault, Bawer believes, are "professors in university creative writing programs [who] tell their students that this is the way to write: load up on concrete details, relevant or not. The more particulars, the better." But what is at stake may be more than commercially oriented teaching or the vagaries of youth: these talented young writers are mirroring a striking change.

A new definition of the self, a new vision of subjectivity is being reflected in 1980s fictions. Cocaine-based novels are only the most extreme example of cultural change in which the traditional American faith in individualism, in insurgent selves transcending, withstanding, or at least withholding assent from unpalatable environments, is dying. This recoil from Emersonianism is not simply a crisis of youth. The world, constituted as a relationship and its artifacts, has slowly grown toward being treated as the only known territory; brand names have only now flowered into use as major social referents, whether what is being mentioned is the cookie bought in a supermarket or a luxurious fur. The self so circumscribed is not a youthcult invention but rather a postmodernist construction, a particular emptiness waiting to become a receptacle for the cultural artifacts that surround it. Like Paola, the young woman in Thomas Pynchon's *V.*, who can speak only in nouns, the characters find meaning only in objects. Just as McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* compresses the novel of manners to an upscale ad and Ellis's *Less Than Zero* reduces the novel of initiation to the equivalent of snuff-porn stills, so new fiction of "sensibility" operates to treat feelings through surfaces, breaking down the distinctions between people and things. In this phenomenological orgy, to borrow from Wittgenstein, the world is all that is the (Gucci) case.

The postmodern sense of fragmentation is now revealing itself in a vision of *emotions* as artifacts, of people as objects in a society whose common culture is increasingly standardized. What is being standardized is the self in fiction and perhaps in theory. This standardization is effected in several ways. Characters in search of a defining place or connection are seen against the linguistic and visual constructs mass culture provides. They seem almost to conform to a Lacanian theory of personality formation as the effort to discover oneself in "otherness," a differentiation of self as a "signifier" seeking to be assimilated into a purely symbolic order. Being is not intrinsic, not the existential *sine qua non;* individuals are only carriers looking for a sign, a billboard-self. Thus these characters seem doomed to equate personality with external objects, to discover self as and in objectified form.

Midlife Writing

These currents are evident not only in young writers, but also in the work of established artists who have achieved their widest audience in the 1980s and whose works reflect the various difficulties of intimacy in middle age. Even in this fiction it is clear that the primacy of individual experience is seriously in doubt. The author is unwittingly complicit in the externalization and standardization of feeling and seems to be writing from the center of a condition he or she cannot control.

The enervation apparent in youthcult fiction surfaces in new fiction of middle age as ongoing depression. Subjecting the ethic of experimentation to the scrutiny of characters abraded by a complex past of serial lovers,

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families, failures, this fiction explores the consequences of contemporary love. It does not aim for the power of *Anna Karenina*, with its apocalyptic passion and loss, or even of *Herzog*, with its histrionic magnifications of the betrayed husband. The fiction of personal life now emerges from a highly rationalized use of linguistic constructs as the vehicle for discovering humanity. It uses language to rationalize and institutionalize emotional trauma. It achieves this goal in several ways: through compressing and limiting explicit reference to trigger words such as "divorce," a label used as the justification for turmoil, through flattening affect by denying differences between minor and great misfortune, and by treating passionate situations as "relationships" to be worked on and over. It springs from the era of separation and divorce agreements, visitation rights, and custody arrangements. Family relationships float in that gray space where volition or emotion have been stripped of spontaneity. Such fiction ushers us into the world of negotiated lives.

In this fictional land, dramatic crisis has been subordinated to a texture of enervating hardships. Like the youthful protagonists of Ellis and McInerney, middle-aged characters in these stories do not see themselves as contributing to their difficulties. Trouble is something that happens to them. They emerge as affected objects rather than initiators. Passivity, objectification, suppression and compression of pathos have transformed the tragedy they experience to a serial flow of misfortune, not initiated or produced by flaws in character, but simply there to be lived through.

Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, and Alice Munro are each exceptional short story writers whose widest audiences have been won in the 1980s. Raymond Carver received both critical acclaim and commercial success in the 1980s. Ann Beattie has been a star in the *New Yorker*'s constellation of writers. Alice Munro, a Canadian, has won critical praise and an enthusiastic American audience. Each of these serious writers, in short stories representative of their work as a whole, has revealed similar changes in the conception of self and of tragedy; each has written passages in which life is rendered as a list of objective events projecting the rough texture of married life.

In Raymond Carver's "Boxes" a man says of his newfound lover:

> Jill always says what's on her mind. She's thirty-five years old, wears her hair short, and grooms dogs for a living. Before she became a groomer, something she likes, she used to be a housewife and mother. Then all hell broke loose. Her two children were kidnapped by her first husband and taken to live in Australia. Her second husband, who drank, left her with a broken eardrum before he drove their car through a bridge into the Elwha River. He didn't have life insurance, not to mention property-damage insurance. Jill had to borrow money to bury him, and then—can you beat it?—she was presented with a bill for the bridge repair. Plus, she had her own medical bills. She can tell this story now. She's bounced back. But she has run out of patience with my mother. I've run out of patience too. But I don't see my options.

In this litany, the abduction of children is not distinguished from outrageous bills or physical abuse.

In Ann Beattie's "In the White Night," Carol and her husband have survived the death of their child, but that loss is subsumed in the mother's vision of life as precisely the succession of crises you cannot escape:

> What happened happened at random, and one horrible event hardly precluded the possibility of others happening next. There had been that fancy internist who hospitalized Vernon later in the same spring when Sharon died, and who looked up at him while drawing blood and observed almost offhandedly that it would be an unbearable irony if Vernon also had leukemia. When the test results came back, they showed that Vernon had mononucleosis. There was the time the Christmas tree caught fire, and she rushed toward the flames, clapping her hands like cymbals, and Vernon pulled her away just in time, before the whole tree became a torch and she with it. When Hobo, their dog, had to be put to sleep during their vacation in Maine, that awful woman veterinarian, with her cold green eyes, issued the casual death sentence with one manicured hand on the quivering dog's fur and called him "Bobo" as though their dog were like some circus clown.

This series of disasters serves to flatten affect by a process of trivialization. There is no

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distinction made between tragedy and annoyance: the death of a child, misplaced fear of serious illness, or someone forgetting the name of a dog. What seems to be important is not what happens to you, but how many items you can list to quantify and therefore establish your legitimate claims as a sufferer. Perhaps not surprisingly, this fiction has reached its widest audience in the 1980s, a period when quantification scales have also become modish in psychology. The Holmes-Rahe stress scale, for example, is widely used for measuring stress in life events. It gives points for the death of a parent or a change in eating habits. Are you stressed out on trivia or tragedy? No matter. What counts is the count. In this materialism of experience lies an analogue to the brand name obsessions of McInerney and Ellis, a common urge to flee from interiority to surface.

Alice Munro's work discloses how the need to "work at relationships" may be analogous to the need to quantify misfortune. The end of spontaneity is written in the need to see intimacy as an achievement, the product of specific (and quantifiable!) steps taken to ensure and define success. Conversely, degrees of unhappiness and wrong moves can also be charted. The Beck Depression Inventory, also in vogue during the decade, often seems to be on the minds of characters who observe and count the pangs of love.

In Alice Munro's "Labor Day Dinner," Roberta is a book illustrator who has left her husband for George, a man who has given up his teaching job to live in the country, fix up his dilapidated farmhouse, and sculpt. Her daughter's diary lists Roberta's demise in the changing labor Roberta performs and in her loss of sexual confidence. Forsaking her art, Roberta has become enslaved to George's food needs and his moldering house. Her pleasure in her sexuality is destroyed by her fear of George's awareness of her declining looks. Yet her carefully noted misery brings a kind of enlightenment.

In her unhappiness, Roberta first understands the painful insecurity she caused her husband by having an affair with George and finally by leaving him for her lover. Now George, with his on-again-off-again interest, inflicts the pain of unstable commitment on her. "Isn't it funny . . . the idea of a pattern like that? I mean the idea is attractive, of there being that balance." The experience of ambivalent love is objectified and given a new bent by this sense of inevitability, a fated absence of what Carver calls "options." These lovers are caught in a cosmic pecking order of relationships, which, if miserable, seems part of the orderly progress of circumstance. More concerned than Beattie or Carver with the nuances of intimacy, Munro has nevertheless made it possible to understand how people can feel they do not "own" their own emotions.

There are, of course, other significant differences among these writers. Raymond Carver examines our cultural condition from the vantage point of paucity. An heir to the traditions of American naturalism, he sees the lives of his working-class characters as largely dictated by economic circumstance. In writing of the consequences to emotional life, he produces a meditation on the relationship between the power of circumstance and the meaning of personal responsibility. He makes us see a deeper aspect of the absence of generational differences than found in Ellis or McInerney.

In "Boxes," Carver focuses on the feelings produced by family relationships in a world in which generational differences between mother and middle-aged son have been eroded by shared experience. Mother has moved and leased an apartment to be near her son, which sounds conventional enough except for the fact that she is herself something of a rolling stone. Her son has little time for her, having met and become preoccupied with Jill, his new woman, and with trying to achieve economic stability. Mother has packed her possessions in boxes, but not left town. Yet her son's past and future are clearly her present life. Her son also regards possessions as always packed or packable; he too has had to be ready to move wearily on, looking for work and love without prospect of security. Each looking for love, each caught in relationships shaded by frustration, the mother, son, and Jill are equally insecure.

Uprootedness and drifting are virtually

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classical American motifs. But in an older literature they are attributes of counterculture characters, the young, the *isolato,* the beat, whose drifting reflected a rejection of bourgeois values. In "Boxes," they express the experience of working-class families propelled out of their niche by unemployment, out of family harmony by drinking or drugs, and able to find rest nowhere. The memory of home is of no home. On the phone with his mother, who has moved back to California, the son, pained by her chronic dissatisfaction, remembers

> the affectionate name my dad used sometimes when he was talking nice to my mother—those times, that is, when he wasn't drunk. It was a long time ago, and I was a kid, but always, hearing it, I felt better, less afraid more hopeful about the future. "Dear," he'd say. . . . "Dear, try not to be afraid," I say. I tell my mother I love her and I'll write to her, yes. Then I say good-bye and I hang up.

The future has arrived and seems without hope for the mother. But ironically, her future prefigures that of her son and Jill, who distracts herself by reading a curtain catalog.

Such spare recapitulation of sentiment and its packaging in the frail word, "dear," that holds what the son knows of family love, reflect the essential containment of each of the story's characters. The "boxes" of the title symbolize the characters' compartmentalization of their own emotional life, the packaging of emotion as though it were second-class mail. Carver's story sensitively measures the impact on a family of the experience of futility. In the son's tearful recognition that he can do nothing for his mother, Carver discloses how a sense of filial responsibility can be reduced to an impotent yearning to be kind, even as all memory of love can be limited to the single word, "dear."

Some fiction of middle age shares with youthcult fiction a denial of the tragic force of death. In Ann Beattie's "In the White Night," the death of a child from leukemia not only joins a list of trivial annoyances but also propels the child's middle-class parents toward being childlike themselves. Suffering does not enlarge character or understanding. This story uses language paradoxically to defy verbalization rather than to articulate feeling. Its controlling linguistic device is a word game in which the players are asked *not* to think about a suggested noun. Carol and Vernon, whose daughter, Sharon, died years before, visit their closest friends, Matt and Gaye. As Carol and Vernon leave after an evening with them, Matt calls out words from a Don't-Think-About-It game, terminating with, "Don't think about an apple." "Carol frowned. . . . Now she saw an apple where there was no apple, suspended in midair, transforming the scene in front of her to a silly surrealist painting." The snow swirls around the imagined apple. The chain of association, the color imagery of red apple/white snow, as professor Lucy Rosenthal has pointed out, leads toward the memory of Sharon's death from leukemia and of the imbalance of white blood cells and red. Yet the memory is displaced from the child onto the snow and to the friends whose advice was not to think. Vernon sees Matt and Gaye as buffers, "alter egos who absorbed and enacted crises, saving the two of them from having to experience such chaos." Yet it is their not-articulating word game that provides the buffer. The solution to both memory and snowstorm is a regression to not thinking and not speaking.

Reaching their house after the drive through the snow, the couple sleeps in the living room, Vernon in Carol's jacket on the sofa, Carol on the floor with Vernon's coat about her. The story's closing line sums up its peculiar effects: "In the white night world outside, their daughter might be drifting past like an angel and she would see this tableau, for the second that she hovered, as a necessary small adjustment."

The "small adjustment" is their recoil from adulthood toward the smallness of childhood, evidenced in such childlike symbolic actions as wrapping themselves in each other's coats and avoiding their bed. Real tragedy can only be dealt with indirectly by displacement onto surface images of the leukemia-snow and red apple. It does not torment so much as contract

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the soul into a "small adjustment." Death diminishes by a process that seems to be one of miniaturization in which surfaces both express and limit whatever pain there is.

Material Differences

Something new has been created from the union of materialism and emotion. In the past, object-laden fiction or a literature of objectified emotion was characteristic of such European experimentalist works as Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* or the fictions of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute. In this country, it has been most associated with the experimentalism of such intellectual artists as Thomas Pynchon. Its appearance in 1980s fiction with a broad, even mass market appeal suggests both its new importance and its changed emphasis.

This 1980s fiction discloses a fascination for advertising culture most simply in the use of brand names in character definition, but more profoundly in utilizing and adapting its processes: compression, packaging, and quantifying. In embracing commercial culture, 1980s fiction focuses on both the illusions it sustains and the manipulative power of its techniques. On the dark side, fiction seems to embrace the illusion that the unknown can be ruled out and the self defined by packaging glitzy or strong enough to contain and label it. On the brighter side, 1980s fiction finds, in the operative processes for sustaining such illusions, coping devices.

In the movement toward surfaces there may be a search for ways of relieving what is perceived as unalterable in the inner life. Characters seem actively to seek freedom from uncertainty, self-hatred and pain. The vision of people as victims rather than masters of their own lives may involve a rejection of the power of individual will, but also relieves the burden of rage or guilt. Hoping for release into the pictoral surface, the impersonal course of troubled love (quantifiable too as midlife crises), or the powdered high, cocaine, are ways of pain-killing through different forms of depersonalization. The spectacle, the object, the impersonal texture, and, as Munro puts it, "the pattern," have become synonymous with experience itself. Each of these writers seems to disclose, in visions of standardization, qualified relief from solitariness.

Knowingly or unwittingly, 1980s writers are our pollsters of the contemporary soul. Delving into its ambivalences, they report that collisions between emotion and materialism, individualism and commercial culture, youth and middle age, have forged a new consensus about our shared limitations and vulnerability, a consensus in the shape of a birth: a shelter-seeking self. □

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Robert B. Reich

A CULTURE OF PAPER TIGERS

The New Entrepreneurship

When the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done," John Maynard Keynes wrote in 1936. A half century later, Keynes's fear seems just as warranted as it was during the Great Depression. That it does is a sign of how thoroughly the culture of the new American paper entrepreneur has come to dominate the American economy of the 1980s. Paper entrepreneurialism not only reflects how we do business, it reflects how we think about business.

As recently as 1974, it was not this way. In that year an economic turning point, of sorts, occurred. The International Nickel Company decided to buy up enough shares in the Electric Storage Battery Company to gain control over the board of directors of Electric Storage and thus allow International Nickel to effectively run the company. The managers of Electric Storage Battery did not want International Nickel to run the company, because they didn't believe that International Nickel could do a very good job of it, and they didn't want to lose their own jobs. They thus regarded International Nickel's act as hostile, as it in fact was—the first in a long and not-so-distinguished line of unfriendly initiatives.

Before International Nickel did this dirty deed, Wall Street had viewed such aggression as unseemly, if not unethical. One didn't just *take over* a company. A company was its managers and employees, its trademark and reputation. These attributes could not be purchased *against its will,* or so it was assumed. Besides, there was no reason for such shenanigans. The American economy, then run along more gentlemanly lines, had grown quite large, and at a rapid clip, without stooping to such behavior.

Then Wall Street's other shoe fell. In 1975 the Securities and Exchange Commission decreed that commissions paid on stock transactions were no longer to be based on fixed rates but were to be negotiable. Henceforth, brokers' commissions were to be subject to the free market, to ungentlemanly competition! Within a year, revenues in Wall Street brokerage houses plunged $600 million. This was no time for squeamishness. Forget the niceties. The Street had to forage for new sources of earnings, and hostile takeovers looked like just the place to start.

The supply of investment bankers, as it were, created its own demand. There were twelve hostile takeovers of $1 billion or more in the remainder of the 1970s; between 1981 and 1984 there were forty-five. Then came the leveraged buyouts, culminating in the last days of the Reagan administration, appropriately enough, with the $25 billion buyout of RJR-Nabisco. In 1978 mergers and acquisitions accounted for less than 5 percent of the profits of Wall Street brokerage houses. By 1988 the "M&A business," as it was affectionately called on the Street, accounted for more than 50 percent of their profits.

The Art of the Deal

And profitable it has been. Over the decade, the average incomes of paper entrepreneurs grew 21 percent, compared with a 7 percent rise in the incomes of everyone else. The demand for paper entrepreneurs, in turn, generated more of a supply. Between 1977 and

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1987 employment in the securities industry doubled—increasing by an average of 10 percent a year, compared to average yearly job growth of 1.9 percent in the rest of the economy. The stock market crash of October 19, 1987, slowed things down a bit. For several months there were poignant stories of $200,000-a-year investment bankers suddenly forced to sell their East-Side duplexes. But within a year, the forward thrust of the M&A business was restored. By the end of 1988 one-quarter of all new private-sector jobs in New York City and more than a third of all its new office space were devoted to paper professionals engaged in rearranging assets.

Deal making has proved particularly lucrative, because every time industrial assets are rearranged, paper professionals earn money. The larger and more complex the escapade, the more money they earn. If they handle the legal complexities, they are paid according to the amount of time they put in. If they manage the financial niceties, they are paid a small percentage of the deal. Thus, there has emerged a strong interest in doing deals.

With good reason. Paper entrepreneurs not only do the deals, but also advise their clients (corporate directors, chief executives, pension-fund managers) about when and whether such deals should be done. Like doctors and automobile mechanics, who occupy equally enviable positions both of advising about the need for their services and supplying the services, paper entrepreneurs have discovered that their is no necessary limit to the amount of service they can urge upon their customers and thereupon provide. Deals thus have become more plentiful and larger.

More plentiful: In 1960 an average of three million shares of stock were traded daily on the New York Stock Exchange. During the entire year, some 12 percent of the listed shares were exchanged and, on average, held eight years before being resold. During an average day in 1988, by contrast, 200 million shares exchanged hands. For the year as a whole, 95 percent of the listed shares were traded, and most remained with their owners for only a few hours. The dollar value of trading in stock index options and futures—bets on how bundles of stocks will move—was five times that of the trades in shares of stock.

Larger: The RJR-Nabisco deal of 1988 generated close to $1 billion in paper-entrepreneurial fees. Like the obscure services listed on hospital bills and automobile repair receipts, those that made up this sum were not self-evident: some $200 million for what was called a "buyout fee"; $400 million for "junk-bond underwriting and bank commitment." "Merger and advisory fees" added another $150 million. The prospective sales of the food and tobacco businesses would earn investment bankers an additional $100 million. The platoon of lawyers and legal advisers reaped at least $50 million.

Deal making also has created abundant work for lawyers, especially when deals turn sour. Texaco and Pennzoil feuded over Getty Oil Company for almost three years. By the end, Texaco had paid over $60 million to lawyers; Pennzoil, $400 million.

Should the economy suddenly fall into recession or worse, no matter. By the close of the 1980s, paper entrepreneurs were preparing to make money on the pending collapse. Investment banks had already amassed funds for "deleveraged buyouts," the purpose of which would be to do the reverse of what had been done during boom times—this time, reduce the debt load and increase the shares of stock. It was happily anticipated that the bonds of newly bankrupt companies could be purchased for a small fraction of their face values and new shares issued to the remaining creditors. The newly reorganized company could then be sold for a fat profit.

Obscene Profits, Obscure Activity

Through all this, the historic relationship between product and paper has been turned upside down. Investment bankers no longer think of themselves as working for the corporations with which they do business. Corporations now exist for the investment bankers, who openly put them into play, buy and sell stock in them, initiate takeovers and leveraged buyouts. Whole departments of investment banks scan corporate America for

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businesses ripe for the plucking. It is as if doctors and auto mechanics went house to house instructing the occupants on what they must do to avoid death or breakdown and then ripped them and their cars apart to make the prescribed repairs.

Investment banks are replacing the publicly held industrial corporations as the largest and most powerful economic institutions in America. In 1987 Drexel Burnham Lambert, Wall Street's fastest growing company, posted earnings of over $1.5 billion, putting it right up there with Xerox and the Monsanto Company. After purchasing RJR-Nabisco, the firm of Kohlberg, Kravis, and Roberts controlled companies with total revenues of $50 billion, transforming KKR into the fifth-largest industrial company in the United States.

Twenty-five years ago the titans of American industry were chief executive officers of major industrial corporations. Today, as in the late nineteenth century, they are investment bankers. Each of the partners of KKR earns about $70 million a year. (One wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is named after its benefactor, Henry Kravis.) Michael Milken, of Drexel Burnham, earned, we now know, $550 million in 1988, a sum that exceeded the total amount spent by the United States in the search for a cure for AIDS. Rarely have so few earned so much for doing so little. Never have so few exercised so much power over how the slices of the American pie are rearranged.

The language through which this economic transformation has been accomplished is colorful and childlike, featuring "golden parachutes," payments of "greenmail," "white knights," and poison pills of all hues. The bright colors mask darker realities, calling into question the purpose of the American corporation in the latter decades of the twentieth century. For at least fifty years it had been assumed that public ownership of stocks assured that America's major corporations were well managed and that public trading in such stocks guaranteed that investors received fair value. No longer.

Golden parachutes are nothing more than generous severance payments, often totaling large multiples of an executive's annual salary and bonus, which are awarded—the parachute opens automatically, as it were—when the takeover becomes successful. The proferred justification is dubious: such insurance is thought essential to preserve the executive's impartial judgment about hostile takeover bids. Without the parachute, so the argument goes, the executive would be tempted to fight the takeover even if it were in the best interests of the stockholders. The logic suggests that the only way stockholders can trust corporate executives not to feather their nests at the stockholders' expense is to provide them a prefeathered nest at the stockholders' expense.

Greenmail is ransom, paid to those who are trying to take over the company, to get them to stop offering the company's stockholders high prices for their stock. The ransom is paid by corporate executives and directors, who presumably would lose their jobs if the predator succeeded. The ransom money comes ultimately from the same stockholders who are being courted by the predator. The justifications for greenmail are equally suspect: executives and directors argue that predators don't understand the business and, once in control, would diminish its value. Alternatively they argue that the stockholders don't know how much their stock is *really* worth, and they are being duped by the low bids of predators. Either way, the logic suggests that the current executives and directors are doing a superb job, and only they are fit to judge how superb.

White knights, poison pills, and further exotica also help incumbent management ward off unfriendly predators. By the late 1980s, managers who sensed the possibility of a hostile takeover employed a technique known as the "leveraged buyout." The financial complexities were dazzling, but the underlying principle was straightforward. The corporate managers borrow money, often at high interest rates, to buy up their company's stock. These loans are backed by the company's assets. The managers who now own the company thereupon make it more valuable, either by increasing its productivity or by selling off its divisions. They thus make a bundle. With high leverage, small improvements in operating

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performance can dramatically increase the value of a tiny equity base.

Here again, the proferred justification is oddly inconsistent with our inherited notions about the function and purpose of the corporation. The argument is that once managers' wealth is tied up in the company, they will become more efficient and improve the firm's performance; that is, managers who own their company work harder and better. But this logic suggests that the same managers have been grossly deficient in the past, failing to act in the stockholders' best interests.

All of these asset-rearranging techniques require the ubiquitous skills of accountants and lawyers. A new field of consultancy has grown up in recent years, euphemistically deemed "earnings management," which consists of the strategic use of accounting conventions—redistributing income from good years to bad, recognizing profits in advance of sales, and similar innovations. The leading edge of American jurisprudence is found in such fields as securities and tax law, where piles of arcane pleadings and truckloads of depositions now inundate our courtrooms and preoccupy squadrons of lawyers, overworked clerks, and despairing judges.

Is This Necessary?

Apologists of such antics argue that they are justified by economic fundamentals. (When you hear an argument based on "economic fundamentals," you would be wise to place a hand firmly over your wallet and keep it there until the perpetrator has moved on.) Faced with the alternatives of investing in new plants, equipment, or research (risky propositions whose payoffs are likely to be in the distant future) or of distributing the earnings to shareholders (who are immediately taxed on such largesse), corporate managers instead see considerable attraction is snapping up profitable, well-run companies with established market positions—even their own. They speak of wondrous gains from "synergy," the dynamic effects of pooled management upon what were formerly independent firms, making the whole greater than the sum of the parts. They wax with equal enthusiasm over the gains to be had from disassembling and selling off piecemeal such parts, thus making the sum of the parts greater than the whole. And through it all, they exhibit faith—endless faith, indomitable faith—in the hidden, *potential* value of the assets being purchased, relative to the price they currently fetch on the stock market.

Most of this is nonsense or worse. The record of the 1970s and 1980s is dismally clear. Acquiring companies rarely have done well for their stockholders. Despite all the claims for synergy, there is little evidence to suggest that mergers have on the average enhanced the basic profitability of merging enterprises. The subsequent rush to dismember suggests, in fact, the reverse.

A case in point. R. J. Reynolds, the giant tobacco company, merged with Nabisco, the giant food processor, in 1985. The merger was then hailed as brilliant strategy, through which the tobacco company would diversify into foods. Just three years later, the newly merged company became the object of a mammoth contest between armies of investment bankers pledging billions of dollars for the privilege of breaking it up once again.

Defenders of such escapades also claim that asset-rearranging is no mere speculative game but a means by which the financial market ensures that resources are available for new enterprise. Close examination belies this comforting view. Wall Street's dynamism has little to do with the financing of new commercial venture. During most of the 1980s, new issues of common stock averaged only about 1 percent of the total stock outstanding. Ninety-nine percent of Wall Street's exuberance pertained to shares of stock already in circulation, which became objects of titillating rumor. Portfolio managers frantically bid against one another to take advantage of small upticks or downblips in this vast casino, betting pension funds or mutual funds in which Americans had placed their savings. In effect, most Americans unknowingly were engaged in continuous bidding against one another (and, if their money was entrusted to more than one fund manager, as was often the case, against

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themselves). It was exactly as if we had all crowded into Vegas for a long binge.

A third justification is often heard of late: takeovers are necessary in order to wake incumbent managers from their stupor. By this view, proper entrepreneurialism is a form of antiseptic, washing away encrusted layers of managerial bureaucracy.

Undoubtedly, American business needs a good housecleaning. But the question is whether hostile takeovers are the most efficient means. There are other, far less debilitating remedies, like competition for markets. Were the antitrust laws enforced against mergers that reduce competition—such as General Foods' recent acquisition of Kraft—managers would have to stay on their toes in order to preserve their company's market share. Product competition is a healthy antiseptic for cleaning away encrusted management. Takeovers are more like defoliants.

The American economy as a whole has not benefited demonstrably from these paper activities. Since the mid-1970s, when most of this began, productivity gains have slowed. Average real wages (controlled for inflation) have stagnated. Average stock prices have barely risen. And only the public-relations office of the United States Chamber of Commerce would contend that American firms have stayed competitive with those of Japan, West Germany, South Korea, and other places around the globe where, incidentally, hostile takeovers and leveraged buyouts rarely, if ever, occur.

Problems with the Paper Economy

I do not want to suggest that all efforts directed at rearranging corporate assets are necessarily wasteful. To the extent that they allocate capital more efficiently to where it can be most productive or smooth out what would otherwise be sudden changes in supply and demand, they make our economy perform better. But what has happened over the last decade has been counterproductive rather than productive. Even by the cynical standards of the 1980s, the new paper entrepreneurs of Wall Street have given greed a bad name.

In one memorable scene of Oliver Stone's 1987 film, *Wall Street,* Gordon Gekko, a corporate raider played by Michael Douglas, takes the microphone at the annual meeting of Teldar Paper, a company he is trying to acquire. America has become a second-rate power, Gekko tells the Teldar shareholders. He cites the nation's trade imbalance and loss of industry. Greed, he says, is all we have left. But greed, he continues, is good. It is what makes America a great place to live. It keeps the system going. Gekko is depicted as a Wall Street villain, but his real-life counterparts, the Ivan Boeskys and Michael Milkens, have neither behaved nor sounded very differently from him. In the end, their legacy cannot be separated from the following problems in America's economy:

- *Myopia:* Improvements in productivity often depend on investment strategies geared to the long term. Productivity gains come gradually. Research aimed at developing fundamentally new technologies is apt to go slowly, yielding little or no profit for many years. The development of the internal combustion engine, electronics, xerography, and semiconductors each depended on a quarter century or more of trial and error. Commercialization often requires the development of large production facilities, distribution and sales networks, and quality control systems. All this demands a willingness to invest now for greater returns in a distant future.

But paper entrepreneurs typically require that investments pay off in the short term at the expense of greater yields later on. General Electric's costly acquisition of RCA, for example, resulted in less research for both. In 1987 General Electric cut its research spending by 8 percent. Under new management, RCA's famed David Sarnoff Research Center, for decades an incubator of television technology, slashed its staff by 25 percent. Or consider Borg-Warner, another company specializing in high technology. After a fierce takeover battle in the 1980s, the firm gutted its research laboratory. A recent study undertaken by the National Science Foundation concludes that takeovers and leveraged buyouts have accounted for a substantial slowing of America's research and development.

Truncated vision is due, in part, to the

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necessity of repaying huge loans used to finance such asset rearrangements. Nothing so focuses the corporate mind as threat of bankruptcy. Yet this is not a complete explanation. Asset rearrangers also have changed the pattern of stock ownership in ways that emphasize immediate gain. Not long ago, the majority of stock on our exchanges was owned by individuals, many of whom remained with their companies for years. It was not unusual for such an investor to take a mildly proprietary interest in how his or her company was doing and what it was planning to do. Today 70 percent of corporate stock is bought and sold by professional portfolio managers of mutual funds, pension funds, and insurance companies. These managers must do more than invest for the future—they must also attract and keep clients. So they are under pressure to demonstrate the short-term earnings that potential clients demand. In the search for quick profits, they move in and out of large positions with little regard for the strengths of the underlying enterprise. Securities analysts and brokers likewise hope to show profits by correctly guessing the short-term fluctuation of price-earning multiples instead of the long-term potential for growth.

On the management side, the motivation is similar. The average corporate chief executive may have an even smaller stake in future growth than the average stockholder. The frenetic movement of corporate assets engenders a similar shifting of managerial talent. Top executives are fired, or they are lured to other newly rearranged corporations. They feel no loyalty to their present companies, which, after all, are regarded by directors and stockholders as little more than collections of financial assets. Thus the average term of office for today's chief executive officers is only four years.

- *Wasted talent:* Asset rearranging also harms productivity by using up the energies of some of our most talented citizens. Paper entrepreneurs now embody the nation's most original economic thinking and energetic wheeling and dealing. The result is a "brain drain" from product to paper. Today's corporate executives spend an increasing portion of their days fending off takeovers, finding companies to acquire, and responding to depositions in lawsuits. Most of our top corporate executives are trained in law and finance—in contrast to three decades ago, when most were trained in marketing, engineering, and sales.

Our best minds are increasingly drawn to the pie-dividing professions of law, finance, and accounting and away from pie-enlarging professions like engineering and science. While graduate programs in law and accounting are booming, engineering and science programs are foundering—again in contrast to other industrialized nations. The most sought-after jobs among business school graduates continue to be in finance and consulting, where the specialty is the shuffling of corporate assets. Out of a recent graduating class of 721 at the Harvard Business School, a grand total of seven reported that they had gone on to start ventures of their own. "Independence" to today's business graduate means working for McKinsey instead of for General Motors.

- *Opportunism:* The money required to rearrange industrial assets—to mount hostile takeovers, to defend against hostile takeovers, to return a company to private ownership by repurchasing the publicly owned shares of stock—typically is borrowed. As has been suggested, high leverage creates extraordinary opportunities for profit. But it also creates substantial danger should the economy sputter and interest payments be missed. This was, after all, the lesson we were supposed to have learned in the 1920s, when America last went on a speculative spree: there are few adventures more thrilling than gambling in the stock market with someone else's money and few more dangerous to the overall economy.

Corporate debt in the 1980s has reached alarming proportions. Twenty-five years ago, the average American corporation paid sixteen cents of every dollar of pretax earnings in interest on its debt. In the 1970s, it was 33 cents. Since 1980, the average large corporation has been paying more than 50 cents of every dollar of pretax earnings in interest. The Brookings Institution, not known for its alarmist rhetoric, undertook to examine the effects on corporate America of a recession

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similar in severity to that which rocked the nation in 1974 and 1975. The Brookings computer simulation revealed that, with the levels of debt prevailing in the late 1980s, one in ten American firms would succumb to bankruptcy.

Such fragility marks the triumph of private greed over social rationality. It may be in the self-interest of a lone paper entrepreneur to bet a giant American corporation against the odds. If he wins, he earns a fortune. If he loses, most of the loss is borne by those who lent him the money; and he can always make another bet. Eventually he will win big. But if all paper entrepreneurs behave similarly, the entire economy is bet against the odds. This is precisely what has occurred.

- *Divisiveness:* An economy based on asset rearranging has a final disadvantage. It tends to invite zero-sum games, in which one group's gain is another's loss. As those engaged in rearranging the slices of the pie become more numerous and far more wealthy than those dedicated to enlarging the pie, social tranquility is threatened. Trust declines. As trust declines, the pie may actually shrink.

There are signs that this vicious spiral has begun, as each corporate player seeks to preserve its standard of living by expropriating a portion of the declining wealth of another group. Corporate raiders expropriate the wealth of employees by forcing them to agree to lower wages and then passing the savings on to the new stockholders. Corporate borrowers utilizing high-yield ("junk") bonds expropriate the wealth of other bondholders, and of employees, by suddenly subjecting the entire enterprise to greater risk. Executives expropriate the wealth of stockholders by paying greenmail to would-be acquirers or by undertaking a leveraged buyout and then reselling the company at a higher price. Investors expropriate other investors' wealth by trading on inside information.

The result is an economy ruled by the cynical values of takeover artists like Asher B. Edelman, whose course at the Columbia School of Business—in which he offered a $100,000 reward to any student who found a company he could acquire—was called "Corporate Raiding—The Art of War." Worse still, especially for workers in dying industries like auto and steel, it is an economy in which the victors' pyrryhic sense of triumph is not very different from that of the T-shirt slogan that became so popular in the days following the stock market crash of 1987, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins."

Throughout the world we are witnessing the triumph of capitalism over centrally planned economies. Risk-taking and initiative are proving to be better stimuli to growth than are directives from the top. It would be a sad irony if the nation that became a model for the social benefits of capitalism succumbed to the zeal of a group of entrepreneurs more intent on rearranging paper than on creating real value.□

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William Adams

SCREEN WARS

The Battle for Vietnam

The Reagan era has bequeathed to us much, including, ironically, a new version of the materialist theory of the politics of culture. The essential claim of this theory is seductively simple: cultural expression reproduces, through all the appropriate "mediations," the topography of social life. In the current version of this theory, the conservative political and social forces of the 1980s have defined the contours of its mass culture. To look in on the movies or television is to see darkly the social foundations of Reaganism: the reaffirmation of "traditional values" (the family, patriotism, work), the resuscitation of anticommunism, fetishes of the marketplace, the attack on alternative lifestyles.

The equation is tempting, especially in the case of one of the more notable cultural bequests of the decade: the films of the Vietnam War. For in the iconography of Reaganism, Vietnam was the protean symbol of all that had gone wrong in American life. Much more than an isolated event or disaster of foreign policy, the war was, and still remains, the great metaphor in the neoconservative lexicon for the 1960s, and thus for the rebellion, disorder, anti-Americanism, and flabbiness that era loosed among us.

It was not, significantly, until the full bloom of Reaganism that the Vietnam War became an acceptable subject for film. *Platoon* (1986), the epitome of the 1980s Vietnam film, was closely preceded or followed by nearly a dozen major productions. And as if to seal the legitimacy of the war as a subject for popular treatment, network television gave us two series, *China Beach* and *Tour of Duty*. From painful taboo to cultural icon, the Vietnam War had suddenly become a rich source of popular fictions, a story we could not hear repeated often enough.

It is convenient, then, to assume that the sudden appearance of "the Vietnam War film" on the cultural scene is linked to the conservative agenda, or at least to expect that the infant genre will reproduce the original political conflict: hawks against doves, cold warriors against new leftists, *The Green Berets* (1968) against *Apocalypse Now* (1979). But neither expectation fits well with the stories most of these films tell. A closer look at the recent Vietnam films reveals instead a tangle of impulses: self-criticism and reaffirmation, toughness and sentimentality.

Depicting a "Bad" War

The trail of paradox begins with the fact that the better part of the genre builds upon the assumption that Vietnam was the model of a bad war. Francis Ford Coppola's *Gardens of Stone* (1987) is emblematic in this regard. The only film to date that deals seriously with professional military characters and institutions, *Gardens of Stone* records the frustration and confusion produced when the Vietnam soldier's experience is pressed against traditional forms of patriotic loyalty and heroism. Clell Hazard (James Cann), the old war horse, veteran of World War II and Korea, paragon of military honor and virtue, describes the war as "bad judgment . . . a screw up." Hazard's surrogate son, Jackie Willow, confesses a similar sort of confusion in a letter from Vietnam shortly before his death. "All my life . . ." he writes, "I knew . . . I'd live and die in

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the Army. Just something I knew. But after this . . . I just don't know anymore." The criticism is painfully inchoate, but its dramatic pitch and function are clear. From the perspective of tradition, both cinematic and political, the Vietnam War was profoundly subversive. It undermined a powerful set of expectations concerning the virtues of heroism and patriotism and the practices that nurture them.

In the films focused on the combat story—*Platoon, Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Hamburger Hill* (1987), HBO's *War Stories* (1987), *Bat 21* (1988)—irony takes the form of an implacable futility. "We just go back and forth blowin' the shit out of each other for hills nobody wanted," says one of the characters in *War Stories*. This image is reproduced quite literally in the exhausting and operatic *Hamburger Hill*, a story based on a real and very bloody operation in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1968. Focusing on a few days in the life of an infantry platoon, the film follows the doomed cast in its horrifying assaults on entrenched North Vietnamese soldiers, a process that consumes most of the principal characters.

Everyone knows, of course, that the source of such futility is not geography. "We been up and down this same terrain before," says one of the grunts in *Hamburger Hill:* "For what?" The question underscores the absence of political logic and purpose, the fundamental aimlessness of the war. Oliver Stone's *Platoon* produces this sense of aimlessness in its photographic technique and narrative structure. *Platoon* plants the viewer in the dense immediacy of the jungle, forbidding a larger tactical or strategic view. The plot unfolds within similarly restricted perspectives. The ultimate horizon of meaning is the tiny platoon. It is a world rich in private and intimate experience and knowledge, but stunningly short of political, historical, or cultural references. The enemy, seen only in fleeting moments, is essentially unavailable and mysterious. The Vietnamese civilian population is predictably "inscrutable," alternately the object of vengeful violence and missionary concern. The characters in *Platoon* eschew ideology and indeed political language of any kind, as if it were impossible to bridge the gap between the brutal realities of the war and the abstract understandings—geopolitics, anticommunism, containment—given to frame it. In the vision of *Platoon*, the war in Vietnam is a conflict that will not be made sense of.

For those who do not die of it, the lesson in irony is completed on coming home to a society violently divided over the war and indifferent, or downright hostile, to its participants. This means not only no heroes' welcome, a master theme in all coming-home films, but that the heroes themselves are exiles in their own land. The characters in *Hamburger Hill* muse bitterly over the now legendary story of returning soldiers being greeted by bands of shit-slinging antiwar protestors. Real or imagined, such rejection is typically answered by withdrawal. The hero of *Birdy* (1985) retreats into a mute fantasy world while caged in the mental ward of a military hospital. In *Distant Thunder* (1988), Mark Libby (John Lithgow), the nervous and introverted hero, retreats to a wild veterans community in the Washington mountains where he and several war buddies live as hostages to their own memories.

The more recent *Jackknife* (1989), the first film of distant retrospection in the Vietnam genre, ties together the separate moments of the ironic cycle in the friendship between two veterans, still struggling, after some twenty years, to come to terms with their memories and one another. With the exception of several brief flashbacks, the story unwinds in the present. But it hinges on two crucial moments in the past: a single battle in Vietnam, where both Megs (Robert De Niro) and Davey (Ed Harris) are wounded, and the earlier time in Davey's life when he was the star of the football team, the idol of his classmates, the quintessential all-American boy.

Jackknife explores the disjunction between these moments. As a Vietnam vet, Davey is a disaster. Alcoholic, withdrawn, and bitter, he cannot find his way back to the war, and thus to the root of his rage. Near the end of the film, Davey finds his way back to his high school and stares drunkenly into the trophy case where his exploits are memorialized. The real mystery, his gaze announces, is how one from such favored origins could have strayed so far from

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the path of promise, especially since that path followed the prescribed route of heroism and patriotic virtue.

There is a deep and sometimes comic bitterness that issues from these reversals. The characters in *Hamburger Hill* resort to a kind of dark stoicism: "Don't mean nothin," they chant, "not a thing." Shifting the object and scale of such anger, the herc of one of HBO's *War Stories* ("The Mine") muses over his imminent death: "God's just been fuckin' with me, now he's through." Secular or metaphysical, political or personal, this bitterness signals the deeper pathos that is by now characteristic of the Vietnam soldier's story.

A Country Coming Apart

The profound political anxiety that rumbles about in these films is that the long episode in Vietnam has somehow subverted the assumptions that define our culture. In the few unflinchingly conservative Vietnam films of the 1980s—*Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1984), *Uncommon Valor* (1983), and the rabid *Hanoi Hilton* (1987)—the allegorical significance of the war is revealed as a crisis of national will. Vietnam was that moment in history when we questioned our own innocence. Here the line to the politics of Reaganism is unmistakable. Our deepest problem in Vietnam, these films suggest, was our own nervous self-regard. But for the most part, the drama of lost innocence figures very differently. The deeper worry of the majority of these films, good and bad alike, is that the old story of American goodness was fatally subverted in Vietnam. And not by some implacable Fate or malevolent Other but through internal, self-generated, self-destructive disorders.

Unlike many World War II films, where the experience of combat creates or intensifies social solidarity, the Vietnam stories are haunted by images and episodes of disintegration. *Hamburger Hill* documents a series of dangerous confrontations between members of the platoon it follows. The conflicts are racial and social, as well as personal, but consistently connected to the miserable futility of the lives the grunts have in common. In *Platoon,* Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) concludes his own experience of the war with the striking summary: "We didn't fight the enemy in Vietnam, we fought ourselves." The remark describes the dangerous conflict in Taylor's platoon. But it is also intended as commentary on the aimlessness of the war. Since there was no obvious sustaining logic to the conflict, no enemy in the conventional sense, we turned the guns—in bitterness, regret, self-contempt—on ourselves.

The theme of political disintegration emerges most dramatically in the suspicion, nearly universal in Vietnam films, of official elites. The combat films—*Hamburger Hill, Platoon, Bat 21, War Stories*—cast a steadily jaundiced eye toward the officer corps, the most available incarnation of authority. The dangerously energetic young lieutenant, often compromised by his class background as well as martial enthusiasm, is an almost requisite figure in combat stories. So, too, are insensitive "higher authorities" who issue the dangerous and often incomprehensible orders that compound the miseries of combat.

The POW/MIA subgenre mentioned above (*Rambo: First Blood Part II, Uncommon Valor, Hanoi Hilton*) chew rather morosely on a bitter and powerfully reactionary sense of betrayal by the highest political authorities. "Will we be allowed to win this time?" Johnny Rambo asks before his first redemptive voyage into postwar North Vietnam. *Hamburger Hill* aims its rage at liberal politicians, journalists, and college students, all compromised by their class connections and antiwar sympathies. Less conservative narratives refocus these complaints, but grapple nonetheless with corrupt and corrupting officialdom. Adrian Cronauer (Robin Williams), the sardonic disk-jockey hero of the darkly comic *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), directs his wit at the alternately inept and malicious American war machine. Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) sustains the bitterly satirical characterizations of civilian and military authorities characteristic of his earlier works, *Paths of Glory* and *Dr. Strangelove*. The allegorical intent in all of this is unmistakable: the Vietnam War was finally our civil war, a story of collective as well as local disintegrations, a

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struggle inside the American mind and body politic.

The problem of lost innocence is also rendered psychologically. The treatment of violence in Vietnam films of the 1980s is instructive in this sense. Brutality and brutalization are almost inescapable subjects in stories dealing with war, but in the case of Vietnam they have taken a peculiarly reflective turn. In addition to the violence that lurks "out there," in the mysterious force of the enemy, there is also the violence that lurks in the heart of the ordinary combat soldier.

This subject is for the most part broached in the form of the ritual passage of the young soldier into the fraternal order of combat. Jackie Willow, the young and doomed hero of *Gardens of Stone,* hankers after the day he will win the Combat Infantry Man's Badge, the sign of the battle-initiated. "And when it's my time . . . if that's the only decoration they bury me with . . . well, I'll rest in peace." Rafterman, the Marine photographer in *Full Metal Jacket*, brutally rephrases Willow's naive longing: "I want to get into the shit," he tells Joker (Matthew Modine), the film's cynical and irrepressible hero. The same sort of desire preoccupies the central figure of the first episode of HBO's *War Stories,* a clerk in Vietnam who wants nothing more than to see some action. He, too, gets his wish, with the predictably ironic conclusion that his first shots fired in anger are his last.

But it is Oliver Stone's *Platoon* that pushes such preoccupations furthest. Like the figures just mentioned, Chris Taylor, the film's hero, is a romantic, eager to learn about himself and the world through the ordeals of warfare. He does, though not in the way he anticipates. For the truly dangerous conflict that Taylor must endure is not the struggle with the enemy, but the struggle between his immediate superiors, Sergeants Barnes and Elias, symbols of sheer destructiveness on the one hand and a binding humanity on the other. Taylor's personal education ends with the discovery that the battle between Barnes and Elias is really a battle within himself. The seat of chaos is not out there, in "the other." It is, Taylor learns, in the recesses of one's own soul. The coda of *Platoon*—"We didn't fight the enemy in Vietnam, we fought ourselves"—here takes on still further allegorical significance. The powerful conflicts in the body politic let loose by the war are rooted somehow in the destructive urges of the collective psyche.

This vague but alluring notion of internal chaos, both personal and collective, appears with striking consistency in a number of films that have appeared since *Platoon*. *Distant Thunder,* the latest version of the postwar readjustment narrative, is the story of Mark Libby's struggle to leave a small community of veterans living in the mountains of Washington and return to the world he has abandoned. As numerous episodes in the story suggest, Mark's essential problem is that he cannot control the aggressive impulses he learned in the war. He thus has no choice but to live as an outcast, the savagery of his surroundings mimicking the wildness of his impulses.

A similar psychology is represented by Megs (Robert De Niro) in *Jackknife*. Although invested with warmth and genuine humanity, there is also a dangerous, unpredictable rage in Megs. We see it first when his buddy Davey, desperately resisting Megs's missionary impulses, demands to see Megs's hands. The knuckles and wrists bear multiple scars, remnants of his many encounters with panes of glass. When he finally succumbs, momentarily, to his own demons near the film's conclusion, we know that in Megs, too, there is a reservoir of violent energy, closely connected to the war and contained only with great vigilance.

Anxiety over the internal rage and violence that surfaced in the war, and perhaps explains it, does not always appear in the form of violent wishes, acts, or memories. It also takes shape in the symbolics of sexuality, specifically in ubiquitous, almost obligatory, references to prostitution. *Platoon* is silent on this matter, but nearly all other "in-country" films feature the rituals of whoring. The HBO *War Stories* episode "The Pass" takes place entirely inside the sort of makeshift bar and whorehouse that typically surrounded base camps in Vietnam. *Hamburger Hill* features two extended sequences in similar terrain and *Full Metal*

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Jacket chooses to fuse the two moments in its portrayal of the Tet offensive. A large part of *Good Morning, Vietnam* takes place in "Jimmy Wah's Bar," an archetypal Saigon strip-joint where almost any sort of pleasure can be had for ten bucks.

This ubiquity suggests that the whorehouse-bar-strip-joint is not just another place in the war but the source of a potent thematic message. *Off Limits* (1988), a military detective story set in Saigon during the war, comes closest to deliberately articulating this message. Like any good detective story, *Off Limits* takes place in a setting of corruption and disease. In this case the scene is a very dark version of Saigon, a den of ". . . gangsters, cowboys, refugees, deserters, druggies, insects, black marketeers." Here the standard location is enhanced by a peculiar narrative twist. *Off Limits* is the story of the multiple murders of Vietnamese prostitutes, murders committed, as we learn in the opening scene, by a high ranking American officer. This flashy symbolism is complemented throughout the film by passages that carefully connect the American presence in Vietnam with prostitution. "I no talk GIs," a Vietnamese whore tells one of the investigators during an official interrogation. "GIs kill my brothers, make fuck-things my sisters. They have big party Vietnam."

One of the not so hidden themes here is that the war itself was a collective violation, perhaps a criminal endeavor, in the psychological if not the legal sense of the word. The possibility was first raised in *Apocalypse Now*. "What are the charges?", the dazed and drunken Captain Willard asks the military policemen who bring him his orders in the opening scene of the film. It is a beautifully formed question, repeated in various ways throughout the film. The renegade Colonel Kurtz is consistently portrayed as a criminal. And the distinction between his individual transgressions and the normal business of the war are deliberately obscured. "Charging a man with murder in this place is like giving speeding tickets at the Indy 500," Willard muses. Kurtz is the individual analogue of the American war machine, the same craft a bit further upstream.

More recent films of Vietnam advance related suggestions. *The Killing Fields* (1985) passionately dissects the cool and abstract logic of national interest that permitted the United States to bomb and support a coup in Cambodia, illegal actions that helped unleash the Khmer Rouge. Other films insist upon a more literal connection between criminality and violent desire. "This war ain't about freedom, it's about pussy," says a wisecracking Marine in *Full Metal Jacket*. It is an alarmingly precise and provocative statement. In the absence of legitimating ends, the destructive passions of war turned in Vietnam into a riot of private, and potentially criminal, desires. Vietnam became an imaginary psychic and physical landscape where all sorts of normally forbidden impulses were given sudden freedom.

The display of such passions, as well as the particular events releasing them, have a good deal to do with the intrinsic fascination of these stories. The fascination is in part voyeuristic. Like a good horror story, the Vietnam War is an intriguing subject for cinematic representation because of the brutal excess it contains. But this superficial intrigue is mixed with a more serious and complicated enthrallment. What is so disturbing in the Vietnam story is that it subverts the traditional narrative framework of American history and identity. The shapes of virtuous missionaries, liberators, anticommunists, to cite a few of the mythical figures in which we have invested cultural capital, are for the most part glaringly absent from the films of Vietnam. What has taken their place is irony, images of disintegration, and fitful meditations on violence, desire, and inner demons.

The Wilderness Metaphor

What complicates this picture is that most of its horror is delivered in familiar and finally reassuring garb. This domestication is achieved in part through the symbolism of setting. In *Distant Thunder,* Mark Libby's memories of the war, and the destructive impulses it left him with, are continuously counterposed to the natural setting of his community in exile. To

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rejoin the family, society, the world is to come out of the woods, to choose the civil over the natural. This opposition is repeated throughout the genre: most obviously, perhaps, in the equation of Vietnam with the jungle, a savage and mysterious habitat where equally savage and mysterious passions come to be exercised. "Never get out of the boat," Willard nervously reminds himself in *Apocalypse Now* as he drifts deeper into the primeval green. Such fear is clearly etched into the mood of all the 1980s Vietnam combat films. *Platoon* develops this code through a claustrophobic cinematography, burying the camera in the close and oppressive surroundings of "the boonies." Most of *Hamburger Hill* takes place in the mud and tangled undergrowth of "the hill," a place of Dantesque proportions in its slimy and gruesome detail.

The symbolic association of Vietnam with a savage natural landscape continues even when the setting is urban and cosmopolitan. *Off Limits* and *Good Morning, Vietnam* take place in Saigon. But their Saigon is a special kind of urban landscape. Like the generic town in the Western, it is marginal civilization, still defined by the vast and dangerous Nature that surrounds it. Symbolically, at least, such proximity explains why the city is so regularly portrayed as the scene of gambling, prostitution, drugs. Cinematic Saigon is the frontier town in Asian drag, site of marginality and perversion, the border of the civilized world.

The familiar figure here is of course "the wilderness," a quintessentially American narrative setting, which takes, in the case of Vietnam, an exotic and mysterious form. Like the original wilderness, cinematic Vietnam is the kind of place where mythical forces do battle for souls. And it is also a place where fear and fascination are mixed in almost equal measure. If the wilderness is finally to be tamed, it is not without a certain risk that one will "go native" in the process, or regret in the end that one did not.

But taming is nonetheless the name of the game, in Westerns as well as narratives about the war, and a number of recent films have given us interesting variations of the domesticating sequence. *Off Limits* employs the conventions of the detective genre to this end. The demonic forces loosed in the world are temporarily brought to bay by the hero-detectives, Sergeants McGriff (Willem Dafoe) and Albaby (Gregory Hines), the standard bearers of order in a Saigon filled with pimps, druggies, gamblers, and deserters. The same is true for the plot of *Distant Thunder,* which returns the wild veteran to the domestic orders of fatherhood and marriage by taming his aggressive impulses.

What is distinctive about this scenario in the case of the Vietnam narratives is that the work of civilizing and domesticating is only rarely directed outward, toward some uncivilized "Other" who haunts the wilds. Consistent with the reflective and psychological turn of these films, the savage has migrated within. The agents of disorder in *Apocalypse Now, Off Limits, Birdy, Distant Thunder, Full Metal Jacket, Platoon,* and *The Killing Fields* are all Americans or American institutions, and the taming of them is finally a matter of collective self-discipline.

Warped and Appealing Heroes

It is not simply the mythical resonance of setting that makes many of the Vietnam stories familiar. Like their less ambiguous World War II predecessors, the narratives of Vietnam supply us with a stock of attractive heroes. The difference is that the Vietnam genre departs wildly from the traditional standards of attractiveness. "I fuck nuclear waste" trumpets Blaster, an appealingly demented character in *Uncommon Valor* during a moment of happy machismo. We are a long way here from John Wayne and Audie Murphy, even in this otherwise conservatively congenial film. But we are closer than might at first be thought to some archetypal and oddly reassuring conceptions of civic and martial virtue.

Such virtue must appear from the outset in very anti-heroic form. For just as Vietnam will not bear the narratives of just causes, it will not support the normal troupe of heroes performing the usual heroic deeds. Since the deeds are so often heinous and so disconnected from satisfying purposes, the hero is himself bound to be scarred. Thus Mark Libby in *Distant Thunder* the central figures in all the coming-

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home dramas are psychologically and morally stained. Their stories consist largely of the purgative cleansing of their souls. The combat stories—*Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, War Stories, Hamburger Hill*—document the violent histories from which such blemishes emerge.

Indeed, the antihero of these narratives is typically outside the normal boundaries of society, an outlaw and rebel. Chris Taylor of *Platoon* murders his platoon sergeant, while Mark Libby in *Distant Thunder* literally lives outside the boundaries of the civilized world. Being good detectives, McGriff and Alababy in *Off Limits* are also figures of the edges, part criminal, part saint. Even the cartoon-like Johnny Rambo is portrayed as an outlaw, a figure of the margins looking in on the normal routines of American life.

Where such estrangement is not literal, it is at least psychological. In *Full Metal Jacket*, Private Joker is set apart from the world around him by his sardonic vision. Adrian Cronauer of *Good Morning, Vietnam* is a less virulent and threatening version of Joker, and similarly estranged from the official world. Even politically muted films like *Gardens of Stone* or *Bat 21* or the flaccid *Tour of Duty* contain clear signals that their heroes are in some important ways different, off-beat, and unable to fit into conventional social patterns.

But although the antihero from the Vietnam war, unlike his straighter predecessors, does not occupy the moral center of things, he remains a compelling figure. Indeed, Vietnam has become in our filmmakers' imaginations a macabre sort of romantic voyage, a testing journey in physical space and the moral geography of the soul. *Platoon* opens with a large troop plane disgorging the young, would-be hero on the steamy runway of distant Vietnam, a prototypical scene repeated or implied in various forms in *Hamburger Hill, Good Morning, Vietnam,* and *Full Metal Jacket*. There are journeys within journeys, too. *Bat 21* literally drops its hero into the inferno of war, as the ubiquitous helicopter does with infantry soldiers in most of the combat stories.

Like more traditional romantic voyages, these journeys are extended ordeals, trials of character and virtue. But in the case of Vietnam, the trial has taken on a special quality. For this war was a journey into not only physical danger but the special torments of a conflict that carried no sustaining logic and that was only briefly supported by the society that organized and financed it.

In the peculiar logic of Vietnam reminiscence, it is this moral ambiguity that supplies the anti-hero with much of his sentimental and romantic power. The cinematic veteran of Vietnam is distinguished from the rest of us by his passage through an ordeal both physical and existential.

The political logic of antiheroism begins to appear in the darkly demotic sense of fraternity that shines through this abuse. "We all no-good dumb niggers on this hill," says Doc, the impassioned black medic in *Hamburger Hill*. The phrase is marvelously supple. "The hill" educates its victims in democratic virtue, through collective oppression and a deeper recognition of human likeness. The egalitarian impulse is also registered in unabashedly populist sentiments, and in this respect the Vietnam films follow more closely the prescriptive formula of the World War II film: wars are fought by common men. Chris Taylor in *Platoon* describes his comrades as "salt of the earth types," a view elaborated in great detail, and with more than a little enthusiasm, throughout the genre. *Hamburger Hill* is full of such types, presented in the appropriate ethnic and racial mix. *Gardens of Stone* and *Off Limits* feature the common man in military dress: the senior enlisted corps, black and white, of the U.S. Army. Robert De Niro's Megs in *Jackknife* is an earthy and compelling blend of quiet tenderness and buried violence etched against the gritty background of a working class neighborhood in Meriden, Connecticut.

Behind such displays of populist enthusiasm, and quietly reinforcing it, is a steady drone of class resentment. The characters in *Hamburger Hill* comment relentlessly on the college students who escaped their fate, while *Gardens of Stone* paints a disparaging portrait of the officer corps. *Off Limits* goes even further in this direction. The high ranking American officer murdering prostitutes turns out to be a

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bitter non-commissioned officer dressed up in the uniform of an army colonel. Like some wayward character of Genet's, his violence is revenge on the status he has always wanted.

Similar goals are achieved in the authority bashing so pronounced throughout the genre. It is difficult in these films to find anyone with positive thoughts about any form of authority, military or civilian. Just as they resent the social inequalities implicit in their experience of the war, the working-class or underclass figures who typically occupy the foreground of Vietnam films are contemptuous of power as part and parcel of their democratic character.

It is significant, however, that such contempt never leads to open rebellion. Indeed, the critical, ironic energy of most of these films is typically constrained by a notion of civic discipline sustained by a muted, abstract, but profound patriotism. This patriotism is most clear in the final stages of the antihero's journey. After making countless references to the futility of the war, and repeatedly acknowledging its destructive consequences, Clell Hazard, the hero of *Gardens of Stone*, decides to return to Vietnam. His logic is in part professional. The war, after all, is "family business," and Clell is bound to play the old warrior's role of guide, protector, teacher. But there is also a more general sense of political obligation lurking in Hazard's professionalism. The same sort of commitment is characteristic of the grunts in *Hamburger Hill* and *Platoon*, who complain steadily about the stupidity of it all but in the end do what they are told. Extending this conclusion to the homefront, postwar dramas like *Birdy*, *Distant Thunder*, and *Jackknife* define their veterans as victims of moral theft: they completed their end of the bargain, but America did not.

The fulfillment of civic obligation and the abstract and sentimental patriotism in which it is rooted take us to the very heart of the charisma of the anti-hero. A good bit of the pathos the cinematic "Vietnam veteran" has come to embody, and thus a good deal of his sentimental and box office appeal, is due to the fact that he did what he was asked to do *in spite of it all*. The veteran is not merely a victim of miscalculation, stupidity, corruption, or betrayal, to note the range of implicit "explanations" for the Vietnam debacle in these films. He is a victim who remains tethered to the polity, and thus to the victimizer, in the midst of his pain: he is the exemplar, in the inverted logic of this *mythos*, of the ultimate political sacrifice.

The Americanization of a Symbol

The considerable interest aroused by the Vietnam War films of the 1980s is closely connected to their strangely paradoxical vision, at once so alienated from yet dependent upon the traditional cultural landscape. There is corrosive energy at work in most of the cinematic renderings of Vietnam produced in this decade, but there is also a subtle form of compensation. As the stage for antiheroic romance, cinematic Vietnam extends to the war an arc of symbolism integral to our own mythical history and mind. And this, in turn, makes possible the release of equally congenial cultural values: equality, pluralism, individualism; the suspicion of authority and power surrounded and softened by a vague and sentimental patriotism. In spite of all the pain, something like "the American character" endures in the darkly charismatic, inverted heroes who suffered and ultimately survived the war.

Things could be much worse, of course, for the very problems that make some kind of salutary meaning necessary also ensure that whatever affirmations these stories have to offer, they cannot reproduce (the Reagan era notwithstanding) the political consciousness that preceded the event they retell. No matter how desperate our urge to domesticate the war or locate within its darkness some form of compensatory light, we will only with great difficulty be able soon to reengage the narrative that broadly defined the pre-Vietnam American world, the United States as "the great locomotive," in Dean Acheson's famous metaphor, "puffing away to pull the rest of the world into civilization." What derails that mighty image is mythic Vietnam, a place of inner demons as well as nervous satisfactions. □

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Stephen Jay Gould

TAXONOMY AS POLITICS

The Harm of False Classification

Categories often exert a tyranny over our perceptions and judgments. An old joke—perhaps it even happened—from the bad old days of McCarthyism tells of a leftist rally in Philadelphia, viciously broken up by the police. A passerby gets caught in the melée and, as the cops are beating him, he pleads: "Stop, stop, I'm an anticommunist." "I don't care what kind of communist you are," says the cop, as he continues his pummeling.

We seem to think by dichotomies and separations. Protagoras asserted, according to Diogenes, "that there were two sides to every question, exactly opposite to each other." We set up our categories, often by arbitrary division based on tiny differences; then, mistaking names for moral principles, and using banners and slogans as substitutes for reason, we vow to live or die for one or the other side of a false dichotomy. The situation is lamentable enough when the boundaries are profound and natural; if cows declared war on chickens, we might deplore the barnyard carnage, but at least the divisions would be deep, and membership by birth could not be disputed. But when humans struggle with other humans, the boundaries are almost always fluid and largely arbitrary (or at least a curious result of very recent historical contingencies). If we are so prepared to base our struggles on group identification, we should at least try to understand (and maybe even to improve) our methods of classification.

We do not ponder the bases of our classifications with sufficient scrutiny. Taxonomy, or the study of classification, occupies a low status among the sciences because most people view the activity as a kind of glorified bookkeeping dedicated to pasting objects into preassigned spaces in nature's stamp album. This mistaken judgment rests on the false premise that our categories are given by nature and ascertained by simple, direct observation. Nature is full of facts—and they are not distributed isotropically (that is, with common properties), so nature does provide some hints about divisions. But our classifications are human impositions, or at least culturally based decisions on what to stress among a plethora of viable alternatives. Classifications are therefore theories of order, not simple records of nature—and what could be more fascinating? More important, since classifications are actively imposed, not passively imbibed, they shape our thoughts and deeds in ways that we scarcely perceive because we view our categories as "obvious" and "natural."

The Legalization of "Drugs"

Some classifications channel our thinking into fruitful directions because they properly capture the causes of order; others lead us to tragic and vicious errors (the older taxonomies of human races, for example) because they sink their roots in prejudice and mayhem. Too rarely, in our political criticism, do we look to false taxonomies, particularly to improper dichotomies, as the basis for inadequate analysis. I wish to present, in this essay, two diverse examples—the classification of drugs and yet another swipe at the primal dichotomy of nature and nurture. I will then argue that the common theme of false division underlies a web of human tragedy in each case.

Joan Baez once said of nonviolence that it

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had been a terrible flop, but that the only worse strategy was violence. I feel the same way about legalization of at least some of the substances now classified as illicit drugs. At the moment, hundreds of thousands of people live in tortured limbo, driven to crime, exposed to AIDS, and doomed (at least statistically speaking) to early death. Millions of others suffer palpably from the deeds of the addicted—experiencing violence, robbery, or simple urban fear that steals the joy of life. Billions of dollars go down the rathole to enrich the entrepreneurs or to try to stem the plague by necessarily ineffective interdiction. The politics of several nations in our hemisphere are corrupted; the cultures of whole peoples severely compromised.

The growth of this tragedy could be halted dramatically (though years would be needed to recover from damage already done) by the single act of legalization. Decriminalization has many supporters, situated in high places and possessed of truly expert knowledge; yet no subject has been more undiscussible (despite a few hopeful signs during the past few months), and no advocacy guarantees a more certain political kiss of death.

As an intellectual, nothing drives me to tears more quickly than massive human tragedy abetted by senselessness. As a professional taxonomist, nothing makes me more angry than senselessness based on patently false classifications. Our current drug crisis is a tragedy born of a phony taxonomy. For reasons that are little more than accidents of history, we have divided a group of nonfood substances into items purchasable for supposed pleasure, and illicit drugs. Opiates were legal in America before the Harrison Act of 1914, originally passed as a revenue measure. The members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, who campaigned for temperance during the day, drank their valued "women's tonics" at night, products laced with laudanum (tincture of opium). We unwittingly acknowledge the previous legality of cocaine every time we ask for the world's most popular cola by brand name.

I could abide (though I would still oppose) our current intransigence if we applied the principle of total interdiction to all harmful drugs. But how can we possibly defend our current policy based on an absurd dichotomy that encourages us to view one class of substances with ultimate horror as preeminent scourges of life (so heroin joins this group, while chemical cognates no more different from heroin than lemonade from iced tea perform work of enormous compassion by relieving the pain of terminal cancer patients in their last days)—while the two most dangerous and life-destroying substances by far, alcohol and tobacco, form a second class advertised in neon on every street corner of urban America. (By the way, in legalizing at least marijuana and the opiates, I would not permit the advertising that we accept for alcohol and tobacco. I would package these substances in the equivalent of plain brown wrappers and make them available under some form of medical supervision. I would then take the billions of dollars saved by ending ineffective law enforcement and launch the most massive educational and advertising campaign in American history to discourage the use of all dangerous substances. We have, after all, done reasonably well in our tentative and piecemeal efforts against cigarettes during the last twenty years. In some social classes at least, the primary pleasure of the last generation is now regarded as a pathology. Just think what we might accomplish if we really tried.)

In the meantime, we wallow in absurdity, and the consequence is death on a massive scale. Consider just a few recent items rooted in our false classification.

1. A *New York Times* editorial describes methadone as a drug that "blocks the craving for heroin." You might as well say that a Coke blocks the craving for a Pepsi. Methadone and heroin are both opiates, but methadone is legal as a controlled substitute for heroin (fine by me; I think they should both be controlled and decriminalized). We permit methadone because some favorable features lead to easier control (oral administration, longer action, and a less intense high), but methadone is a chemical cousin to heroin.

2. Representative Charles Rangel, implacable foe of legalization, spurns all talk about this

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subject as the chatter of eggheads. He writes (*New York Times,* Op-Ed, May 17, 1988): "Let's take this legalization issue and put it where it belongs—amid idle chit-chat as cocktail glasses knock together at social events." Don't you get it, Mr. Rangel? The stuff in the glasses is as bad as the stuff on the streets. But our classifications permit a majority of Americans to live well enough with one, while forcing a minority to murder and die for the other.

3. Former Surgeon General Everett Koop, who was hired by Reagan to be an ideologue and decided to be a doctor instead, properly branded nicotine as no less addicting than heroin and cocaine. Representative Terry Bruce (D-IL) challenged this assertion by arguing that smokers are not "breaking into liquor stores late at night to get money to buy a pack of cigarettes." Koop properly replied that the only difference resides in social definition as legal or illegal: "You take cigarettes off the streets and people will be breaking into liquor stores. I think one of the things that many people confuse is the behavior of cocaine and heroin addicts when they are deprived of the drug. That's the difference between a licit and an illicit drug. Tobacco is perfectly legal. You can get it whenever you want to satisfy the craving."

William Jennings Bryan argued that we were about to crucify mankind on a cross of gold. Are we not significantly lowering the quality of American life for everyone, and causing millions of deaths directly, by basing our drug policy on something even worse—a false and senseless classification?

Nature and Nurture Resartus

With this most contentious issue of the ages, we encounter the added complexity of a doubly false dichotomy—first of the subject itself and second of political allegiances supposedly owed to one side or the other.

In my more cynical moments, I sometimes think that we cling to the nonsensical separation of nature and nurture primarily for reasons of euphony (much like the division between God's "words" and "works," so popular in past centuries)—for I can't think of any other possible justification. You cannot take an essential integrity and divide it into two opposing agents of construction. Such a strategy makes about as much sense as trying to explain the character of table salt from the properties of sodium metal and chlorine gas, two serious poisons.

Most of us understand that complex behavioral traits cannot be attributed either directly to genetics or to environmental composition on the *tabula rasa*. But so many people then imagine that the more sophisticated position calls for "interaction" in the construction of each behavior from differently titrated mixtures of the two primal components—as in the common and nonsensical statement that intelligence is 80 percent inherited and 20 percent environmental. (I use "nonsensical" here in the literal, not the pejorative, meaning.) But this version of interactionism only provides the smallest improvement over the original dichotomy, for it maintains the false classification without change: that is, we are now allowed to mix the two ingredients, but they remain as the indivisible (and recoverable) elements of all overt phenomena. True reform would require the overthrow of habits in thought dating at least to Plato. We would have to acknowledge that the so-called interaction is the essence of the thing itself, not the epiphenomenal expression of pure and underlying causes. (In technical parlance, when interactions are non-additive, then resulting expressions are emergent, and not reducible to contributing factors viewed as pure components.) There is no "real" human nature at a biological core, diluted like the shadows on Plato's cave by environmental components of any resulting behavior. We are social creatures built by biological evolution; if the term "human nature" has any meaning at all, it can only specify an interaction that cannot be reduced by decomposition into nature and nurture.

This erroneous dichotomy of nature and nurture is then worsened by an equally false correlation with the oversimplified political dichotomy of right and left. Nature, as a theory of limits and inequality, is supposed to be the domain of the right; nurture, as a statement

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about flexibility, is the ideology of the left. These identifications have often held, especially in our century, but they arose from particular contingencies, not from a necessary logic of argument. "Nature" forged its appeal in the utility of biological determinism as support for the inevitability of social inequality. But two arguments should convince us that this correlation of false dichotomies only deepens the individual errors—and that, to be programmatic for a moment, the left has erred greatly in shunning biology. We cannot prevail if we abandon a powerful source of argument to opponents who use it falsely. Rather, we must struggle to get biology right ourselves.

First, the identification of biological causes with conservative interests is a limited and recent phenomenon. A different tradition has viewed biology as an agent of social reform—a call for realignment and liberation based on biological potentials not permitted expression in the light of false social definitions. Bazarov, the leftist intellectual who dissects frogs in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, represents a prototype for the general argument. Cesare Lombroso and the other Italian founders of criminal anthropology in the late nineteenth century viewed themselves as socialists committed to a more rational order that would fit punishment to the nature of wrongdoers (and thereby enhance the prospect of reform) rather than to the character of their actions. Several of the original Fabians were committed eugenicists who placed their hope for a happier socialist future in the breeding of better people.

Second, and more important, pure environmentalism can be as cruel and as illiberal as the worst expressions of biological determinism. "Nurture" can act as a theory of blame and limitation, while "nature" can be liberating in two senses—either as a reassertion of the Jeffersonian hope that a proper definition of human nature will break boundaries, or only by an understanding of Spinoza's dictum that true freedom is the recognition of necessity. In quantitative terms, I suppose that no misuse of "nurture" will ever match the millions of lives restricted or curtailed in the name of "nature" through the theory of biological determinism. But who can calculate the aggregate suffering imposed by rampant Freudianism, condemning so many parents to lives of crushing guilt as supposed agents, through inadequate nurture, of mental illness or retardation in their children—when it should have been so obvious that minds, as well as bodies, must also be subject to genetic and congenital malfunction.

To cite just one example. No well-informed person now doubts that serious forms of classical childhood autism represent a biologically based disability (perhaps curable with better definition and understanding in the future, but not open to such basic intervention today, alas)—subject, of course, to an enormous range of expression dependent upon quality of parenting, education, therapy, and so on. Sweep dogmas aside, and no other explanation makes sense. The syndrome can be so devastating, so stereotyped in its expression. The affected children so often come from ordinary homes, filled with normal siblings and loving parents. Psychobabble never could, or dared, claim that the parental insult once so widely blamed for autism could be any more than a subtle mistake—a minor deficit or oversufficiency of maternal attention (always blame the mothers of course)—amplified by peculiar loops of positive feedback to a syndrome of such desperate disfunctionality. Is such an idea even vaguely credible; could evolution make a creature so fragile that the most impalpable of defects in rearing could so derail normal development? All parents would have to be paragons of instinctive perfection.

Nonetheless, Niko Tinbergen, the most saintly man who ever graced my profession, was a major promoter of the sociogenic theory. He devoted his Nobel prize lecture to the subject in 1973 and, late in his life, wrote an entire book to advance his ideas (N. Tinbergen and E. A. Tinbergen, *"Autistic" Children: New Hope for a Cure*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983). Tinbergen, cofounder with Konrad Lorenz of modern ethology, was perhaps the world's greatest observer of animal behavior. He thought that nonverbal methods of communication in other vertebrates might offer some hints in interpreting the behaviors of autistic children without language. He also believed that the rearing methods of other

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vertebrates might offer clues for useful strategies in therapy. I suspect that he was correct in these conjectures, and that his specific suggestions were both humane and useful in many cases.

But Tinbergen went further and developed a theory for the causes of autism. He made a crucial mistake in concluding that the increase in frequency of autism represented a growing pathology of modern life rather than an artifact of improved reporting (the syndrome was not even defined until 1943). He then invoked the favorite themes of classical ethology—natural is right; natural works best; natural is honed to functional optimality in Darwinian fires; domesticated animals often lose these natural instincts; human civilization is a form of domestication; we have lost our automatic "feel" for best ways, while increased crowding, pollution, and stress encourage disfunctional behavior. He therefore decided that autism was a sociogenic condition unwittingly caused by parents under stress and inadequately instructed in childrearing. This, he hastened to add, was nobody's fault and should elicit no blame, but the cause still lay predominantly with mothers not sufficiently devoted to childrearing amidst the maelstrom of modern stresses and commitments. In 1972, he wrote about the necessary and ever so subtle adjustment between too much and too little and argued that both animals and lower-class mothers find the right balance "naturally" (and thereby save their children from autism):

> We believe that one can learn a great deal from observing female mammals in the process of rearing their young. Their procedure could be characterized as "watching all the time, but acting only when the baby demands it, either by giving signs of distress or by being reckless." In this respect it seems that working-class and peasant mothers are, intuitively or of necessity, better mothers than many intellectuals and over-affluent mothers with few children.

Then, in his Nobel lecture, published in 1974, he added:

> Many autists are potentially normal children, whose affiliation and subsequent socialization processes have gone wrong in one way or another. . . . This can often be traced back to something in the early environment—on occasion a frightening accident, but most often something in the behavior of parents, in particular the mothers. Let me hasten to add that in saying this we are not blaming these unfortunate parents. Very often they seem to have been either simply inexperienced . . . or overapprehensive; or overefficient and intrusive; or, perhaps most often they are people who are themselves under stress. For this and many other reasons, the parents of autists deserve as much compassion, and may be as much in need of help, as the autists themselves.

I loved Niko Tinbergen, but I cannot read these words without welling anger. My handicapped son, who is not classically autistic, attends a class for "higher functioning" children in a fine school primarily dedicated to autists. I know many parents of severely autistic children. They are ordinary, loving people whose lives have been touched deeply and permanently by a biological tragedy. No one has ever raised a child without making some minor, even systematic, mistakes. It doesn't matter how many times a learned man says that he's not blaming you even though you did it; no blow could be more cruel for parents who have to cope with so much. That the cruelty rests upon a manifest falsehood only deepens the injustice.

Biology is not a right-wing plot; biology can be liberating. The left must struggle to develop its critique and its program, not by eschewing biology and leaving a phony argument about determinism for exploitation by opponents, and not merely by condemning false biological claims—but by understanding and then substituting the genuine, nonreductionist view of interaction for the older sterility of nature vs. nurture. We must understand enough about modern genetics and paleontology to grasp the surprising fact that human races differ so very little by virtue of the large range of variability within each group and the minor average distances between groups. We must recognize that this fact emerges as a consequence of the geologically insignificant period of separation for modern races (we may all have shared a common ancestor in Africa less than 250,000 years ago). Human equality, in this restricted

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biological sense, is a contingent fact of history. We might have lived in a different world with different moral dilemmas—if, for example, human races were very old and had accumulated significant differences; or if ancestral species had survived and presented us with the dilemma of a group whose humanity could not be denied, but whose mentality could not match ours.

We must recognize that the biological influences upon behavior do not generally lie in the superficial traits of overt and adaptive action that sociobiologists love to discuss in the speculative mode. Rather, the biological and neurological constraints upon mental activity probably have their main expression in pervasively general, but highly abstract structural rules—the universal grammar of Chomskyan theory (that can generate any specific language as a complex sociohistorical instance), or even (to present a humorous recursion to the premise of this article) the tendency to order by dichotomy and division. Our struggle would then be to find the best divisions—to marry the biological ineluctables of a deep substrate with any overt expression. If we are compelled to think by classification, it behooves us even more to examine the basis of our divisions. Nature vs. nurture cannot be a viable candidate if biology gives us a broad substrate of flexibility, and circumstance fleshes out a particular result by mixing influences into a brew flavored by interactions that have no meaning or definition as piles of components.

Cicero tells a story about a certain Zopyrus who accused Socrates of inborn vice, easily inferred from his physiognomy. Socrates's disciples defended their master as inherently virtuous, but Socrates insisted that Zopyrus was quite correct. He did possess the tendencies to vice, but had prevented their expression through the exercise of reason. So what was inborn in Socrates and what the effect of nurture? What do we have but the man as an integrity? Know thyself. □

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Herman Schwartz

CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE REAGAN COURT

Challenging the Second Reconstruction

It took all of Ronald Reagan's eight years. But it now appears that he achieved one of his major goals: hastening an end to the Second Reconstruction in America. Reagan not only succeeded in reducing the protection of specific laws; he transformed the federal judiciary, once the foremost champion of individual rights, into a threat to those laws.

The key to this transformation was the Reagan appointments to the Supreme Court. Along with Nixon appointee William H. Rehnquist, whom Reagan elevated to chief justice, and conservative Kennedy appointee Byron White, the Reagan justices—Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, and Anthony Kennedy—have consistently voted together to strike at civil rights laws adopted for minorities, women, and the disabled.

Affirmative Action

The Court's approach to affirmative action is the best illustration of this change. Affirmative action has troubled the Court since it first faced the issue in 1974 in a case involving preferential admissions to a state law school. There, the Court avoided the issue by dismissing the case on procedural grounds. Four years later, it could duck the problem no longer, and in the landmark *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), it gave a constitutional green light to race-preferential plans in admittance to state-run higher education so long as the plans did not involve fixed quotas. There was no majority decision, as the Court splintered three ways in a 4-4-1 division. Because he was the decisive swing vote—as in so many cases during his time on the Court—Justice Lewis F. Powell, the conservative Virginia Democrat appointed by Nixon, would set the governing rules for legally acceptable affirmative action in *Bakke* and a series of sharply divided Supreme Court decisions over the next ten years.

A full majority was available the following year, however, in *United Steelworkers v. Weber* (1979), when a 5-2 vote of the Court upheld a private employer's affirmative action plan against a challenge under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination in employment. The following year, in *Fullilove v. Klutznick,* six justices upheld a federal government plan to require states to set aside 10 percent of their contracts for minority business on construction financed by the federal government. All the justices who voted to uphold the plan, including Chief Justice Warren Burger as well as Justices Powell and White, made a point of commenting on the sad history of racial discrimination in the construction industry.

By 1981 affirmative action seemed solidly established. Many employers, universities, and state governments had become accustomed to it. Some even saw affirmative action as a positive benefit. As a Bank of America executive observed, "We want to ensure a work force that reflects the diversity of the markets that we serve." Hundreds of thousands

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of plans in various industries were established and minorities and women were able to make sizeable gains. At the Kaiser plant in Gramercy, Louisiana, the site of the *Weber* case, the number of minority craft workers jumped from five to fifty-six (today they are almost 20 percent of the total). Supreme Court rulings in other civil rights settings, particularly those making it easier for minorities and women to win job discrimination suits, added to the force of *Weber*. In order to forestall suits or settle them, employers adopted affirmative action on their own.

Reagan, Ed Meese, and Bradford Reynolds changed all that, despite the fact that in the 1980s the strong initial complaints against affirmative action, especially by Jewish groups fearing the revival of the kinds of quotas once used to exclude Jews from higher education, quieted down. From its first days in office, the Reagan administration targeted affirmative action. Professing devotion to "color blindness"—a devotion that developed only when the possibility arose that whites might be affected by color consciousness—the administration launched a full-scale attack against civil rights statutes. Most of its efforts failed. It was continually rebuffed by Congress, and, more often than not, the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action plans except when white employees were laid off in favor of minority workers with less seniority.

Reagan and Meese had a complete triumph in one respect, however, They reshaped the federal judiciary in general and the Supreme Court in particular. Despite the Robert Bork defeat, when Anthony Kennedy took his seat on the High Court in February 1989, it finally became the Reagan court.

The first ominous sign appeared two months later when Kennedy joined the four other conservatives in ordering a reconsideration of an important 1976 civil rights decision. That was just a signal, however, for the reconsideration order itself did not actually decide anything. The case of *Richmond v. J. Croson and Co.* the following year did, however, and in both style and substance the Court's decision revealed such a cold indifference to the continuing plight of minorities that Justice O'Connor, who wrote the Court's opinion, felt impelled to protest that the majority did not think that "government bodies need no longer preoccupy themselves with rectifying racial injustice."

The facts in the case were these: In 1983, the Richmond City Council, seeing that blacks had almost never gotten any city contracts, voted to require prime contractors on city contracts to set aside at least 30 percent of their contract dollar amount for minority business enterprises. Waivers were available if the goal could not be met. The plan, which was modeled on the federal plan approved in *Fullilove,* was designed to last for five years, but after the plan had been in operation a few months, a white prime contractor, who had lost a contract for plumbing fixtures in a Richmond city jail, challenged the city.

In a 6-3 decision the Court struck down the Richmond plan. Writing for the majority, Justice O'Connor declared that as a matter of fundamental constitutional law, official action for minorities to help make up for some of the disadvantages resulting from centuries of oppression would be viewed by the Court with the same hostile skepticism—in constitutional terms "strict scrutiny"—as prejudiced and racist actions against minorities. She then set down conditions for a constitutionally acceptable program so stringent that few such plans will ever pass legal muster.

In her opinion O'Connor also had to explain away the *Fullilove* decision, which was the model for the Richmond plan. She did so by resorting to some constitutional history to distinguish between federal and state power. According to her, the Fourteenth Amendment was adopted in order to prevent the states not only from doing bad things to blacks but from doing good things for them that might adversely affect whites. "Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment stemmed from a distrust of state legislative enactments based on race," she wrote in the decision that led a bitter Justice Thurgood Marshall to protest that this "turns the amendments on their heads. . . . Nothing whatever in the legislative history of either the Fourteenth Amendment or the Civil Rights Acts remotely suggests that the States

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are foreclosed from furthering the fundamental purposes of equal opportunity to which the Amendment and those Acts are addressed."

The *Croson* decision also exposed the meretriciousness of one of the Reagan justices' most frequently proclaimed loyalties. Since coming onto the Court, O'Connor has been a vociferous defender of localism and states rights. She and the Reagan conservatives have continually proclaimed their allegiance to judicial restraint, repeatedly attacking liberals for not showing proper deference to the popularly elected branches of government. But the virtues of localism and of judicial restraint were conveniently forgotten in *Croson* when it came to protecting white contractors. Suddenly the decision of a local city council no longer mattered. Instead, for O'Connor, the plan adopted by a 5-4 black majority of the Richmond City Council was an exercise of blatantly racial politics by blacks that justified especially close scrutiny by the courts.

Rough as it was, the Court's assault on affirmative action in *Croson* did not satisfy the two newest Reagan appointees. Both Scalia and Kennedy condemned all race-preferential programs, insisting instead that the only acceptable approach is one that limits preferences to identifiable victims of specific discrimination.

Victims' Rights

But proving you are a victim of discrimination is no easy task before the Reagan court. In the past, discrimination victims could rely on the Supreme Court's 1971 ruling in *Griggs v. Duke Power*. There, Chief Justice Warren Burger, speaking for a unanimous Court, ruled that once employees show that an employer's ostensibly neutral employment practices result in a grossly disproportionate disparity between the minorities in the workforce and those in the pool from which that force is drawn, the employees win unless the employer can show that the practices are justified by business necessity. One of the many benefits of this decision was that it forced employers to examine and discard many tests and requirements that they had long used unthinkingly. Such qualifications as high school diplomas for janitors and height requirements for police, which had excluded many minorities and women, often turned out to be unnecessary.

The difficulty and expense of defending these cases after *Griggs* led many employers to settle or to adopt affirmative action plans voluntarily. They anticipated that such plans would not only take care of the discrimination charge by minorities and women but, if court-approved, would also protect them against so-called "reverse discrimination" suits by white male workers.

In *Ward's Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio* (1989), the Reagan Court changed this balance by requiring employees to prove that their employer is *not* justified in using an employment practice that results in disproportionately few minorities being hired. The decision, which overturned eighteen years of law, is contrary to normal notions of who has to prove what in a suit. It is extremely difficult to establish that an employment practice is not justified, for the employer has most of the evidence about why he or she chose a job selection procedure. It is hard for an employee to get access to that information, and if the plaintiff is an applicant who was turned down for a job, he or she is even less likely to know about the business in question.

The Reagan Court did not stop here, however. The same day that the Court issued *Ward's Cove,* in *Martin v. Wilks* it hit at challenges to employment discrimination from the other end. Many employers, facing a long, drawn-out suit, choose to settle and accept a court-approved consent order, often involving the establishment of an affirmative action plan. Hearings are held to give interested parties a chance to be heard on the fairness of the deal, and if it is approved, this has usually meant that the matter is closed. Those who could have come into the suit and didn't choose to can rarely mount an effective challenge later.

Or so it was before the Court's decision in *Martin v. Wilks*. There the five conservatives, led by Rehnquist, ruled that white firefighters who could have come into the Birmingham suit when it was being litigated but chose not to could challenge it as much as ten years after the

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plan went into effect, and even later. The decision overrode decisions of almost all the federal appellate courts going back to 1980. As a result, employers considering settlement will now have another strong reason not to. Not only has their litigation position been immensely strengthened by *Ward's Cove,* but even if they decide to settle, they will not gain their other goal, which is to be protected against suits by nonminority employees.

The Court's patience was much shorter, however, when it was women or minorities who delayed in suing. In *Lorance v. A.T.&T. Technologies, Inc.,* decided a week after *Martin v. Wilks,* the Court threw out the case of several women who had tried to challenge a seniority system for being deliberately discriminatory. When the system was first adopted in 1979, the women were not harmed by it. Not surprisingly, they did not choose to file a difficult and expensive lawsuit against something that had not yet hurt them. But when in 1982 the new seniority system began to result in their demotion, they promptly sued. "Too late," said the Court. The women should have sued when the system was first instituted, even though they were not affected by it until three years later. To allow the suit, said Justice Scalia, "would disrupt . . . valid reliance interests," something he and the majority were quite willing to tolerate in the *Martin* case, where white males delayed nearly ten years before suing.

Original Intent

These decisions follow from a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose approach to legislative and constitutional intent. Shortly after Edwin Meese became attorney general in 1985, he told the American Bar Association that the "original meaning of constitutional provisions and statutes [is] the only reliable guide for judgment" by judges. Where individual rights based on constitutional provisions are to be considered, Meese went on to insist, the framers' original intention was the sole legitimate basis for constitutional analysis.

"Original intent" is, however, a particularly unreliable guide for determining the scope of constitutional rights about discrimination and equality under the Civil War Amendments. Even the foremost advocate of "original intent," Robert Bork, once conceded, "History . . . tells us much too little about the specific intentions of the men who framed, adopted, and ratified the great clauses." Also, we are a nation with a racist and sexist history, and the history of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibiting discrimination by the states is clouded by ideas long since discredited. In the original debate over the Fourteenth Amendment what comes through is a resistance to any kind of racial mixing and an acceptance of segregation. As the late legal historian Alexander Bickel concluded, "[T]he Amendment as originally understood, was meant to apply neither to jury service nor suffrage, nor antimiscegenation statutes, nor segregation." The same Congress that adopted the Amendment appropriated money for segregated schools in the District of Columbia.

If anything, the attitude underlying *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), where the Supreme Court gave its stamp of approval to segregation is closer to the "original intent" of the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment in the 1860s than was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). And so far as the constitutional rights to equal treatment of women are concerned, a good indication of the mid-nineteenth-century attitude is Justice Joseph Bradley's comment in an 1873 decision upholding Illinois's authority to deny women the right to practice law. Just five years after the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, Justice Bradley observed, "The paramount destiny and mission of woman are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. That is the law of the Creator."

With statutory rights, however, the matter is quite different. There has usually been no dispute over the proposition that, as Chief Judge Patricia Wald of the Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., wrote recently, it is the business of the judge to "try and enforce . . . [statutes] as Congress meant them to be enforced." Congressional legislative history is usually available in the form of committee reports and debates, often deliberately created in order to help courts interpret a statute.

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Congress and others in fact consider committee reports to be the official legislative commentary on a law, and the reports are prepared and approved with that in mind.

Conservatives have turned the matter upside down. They advocate original intent for constitutional questions, where it really doesn't have much of a place, but urge the opposite on statutory questions. Justice Scalia, the most aggressive and imaginative of the new conservative justices, has argued in speeches and opinions that the search for the legislative intent of a statute is unwise and unwarranted. "Asking what the legislators intended . . . is quite the wrong question," he said some years ago. Legislative history and other such sources of congressional intent should be ignored. According to Scalia, a statute should be read "not on the basis of which meaning can be shown to have been understood by a larger handful of the Members of Congress; but rather on the basis of which meaning is . . . most in accord with context and ordinary usage." Scalia has, in fact, frequently shown his scorn for the legislative branches, Congress, and the state legislatures, and his approach has given the Reagan justices a free hand in developing their notions of "context and ordinary usage."

What this selective approach to history means in practice may be seen with particular vividness in two cases decided on the same day in the closing weeks of the 1988–89 Supreme Court term: *Patterson v. McClean Credit Union,* which dealt with the 1866 Civil Rights Act, and *Dellmuth v. Muth,* which ruled out suits against states in federal court under the Education of the Handicapped Act.

Patterson v. McClean Credit Union is the case in which Justice Kennedy first showed where he stood on civil rights issues. There he voted to reconsider *Runyon v. McCrary* (1976), a 7-2 decision that, following a decision in a housing case eight years earlier, ruled that the 1866 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination in all private contracts. Many Supreme Court decisions and over one hundred lower court cases had relied on these decisions, and they were an important part of the civil rights structure. *Patterson* itself dealt with whether the 1866 act banned racial harassment on the job, and nobody in the case even questioned the correctness of *Runyon*. The 5-4 decision to reconsider that decision in April 1988, after *Patterson* had already been argued, sent shock waves through the civil rights community.

In response, an avalanche of briefs supporting the *Runyon* decision, including a bipartisan brief from sixty-six senators and 118 members of Congress, descended on the Court, and the conservatives quickly backed off. Kennedy wrote their opinion.

First, Kennedy grudgingly reaffirmed *Runyon,* but just on the basis of precedent, without commenting on its correctness. He then weakened the Act significantly by reading it as not protecting against racial harassment on the job or job promotion—unless the promotion involved "an opportunity for a new and distinct relationship between the employer and employee." For his statutory interpretations, Kennedy relied on his own reading of the phrase "make and enforce" a contract and his conception of how the 1866 Civil Rights Act meshed with the 1964 Civil Rights Act despite the hundred-year difference in their enactment dates. No precedent or other authority was invoked by Kennedy, and the legislative history cited by Justice Brennan showing that Congress intended an expansive reading to "make and enforce" was simply ignored.

Kennedy also wrote for the Court in the *Dellmuth* case. In that decision, he and the conservative majority refused to allow a handicapped student to recover damages from the State of Pennsylvania for violating the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA). When Congress enacted the EHA in 1975, Kennedy said, it did not comply with a Supreme Court ruling that, if Congress wants to subject the state to damage suits, it must do so not only clearly (which it had) but explicitly in the text of the statute. The catch is that this requirement was not imposed by the Court until 1985 and, as the four dissenters complained, "could have [been] anticipated only with the aid of a particularly effective crystal ball." Dismissed by the majority as irrelevant were what Kennedy conceded were strong indications by Congress that the states were indeed to be held liable in such damage cases.

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Back to the Future

The consequences of this onslaught are already apparent. Less than three months after these decisions, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that at least thirteen racial harassment cases brought under the 1866 Civil Rights Act had been dismissed since *Patterson*. Lawyers are turning down employment discrimination cases because they are too costly to litigate and almost impossible to win. According to lawyers for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., the Court's decisions have made it "difficult to bring a case; far more difficult to settle a case; difficult to decide to settle a case."

The result is a situation reminiscent of a century ago when, in an 1883 decision that drew an angry dissent from the first Justice John Harlan, the Supreme Court held that "there must be some stage in the progress of [the former slave's] elevation when he . . . ceases to be the special favorite of the laws." That ruling led to decades of discrimination and segregation, as Congress, the High Court, and the nation turned their backs on the First Reconstruction. Blacks are certainly not as helpless today as the ex-slaves were a century ago, and national attitudes are also very different. But the consequences of racism remain, and even without a Bensonhurst or a Howard Beach, America cannot afford to abandon the Second Reconstruction that the Supreme Court initiated in 1954 with its *Brown* decision.

To all this, the Reagan court seems oblivious. In *Croson,* O'Connor found it necessary to protest that the majority did not "view racial discrimination as largely a phenomenon of the past." In *Patterson,* Kennedy insisted that "neither our words nor our decisions should be interpreted as signalling one inch of retreat from Congress's policy to forbid discrimination in the private, as well as the public, sphere." Perhaps not. But for the black plaintiffs in those cases, such words are hardly consoling. What they point up is that the only kinds of racial injustices the Reagan court now finds worth rectifying are instances of demonstrably intentional prejudice aimed at individuals. That is better than nothing, but given the persistence of deeply entrenched racism and sexism, it is grossly inadequate.

A hostile federal judiciary led by the Supreme Court can only be counteracted by state and national legislation if we are to avoid a quick end to the Second Reconstruction. But as recent history shows, getting such legislation passed, especially by Congress, is difficult and time consuming. Whether enough political muscle can be mustered is uncertain. If it cannot, what is certain, is that the future for minorities, women, and all who have been hurt by discrimination will be bleak—even by 1980s standards. □

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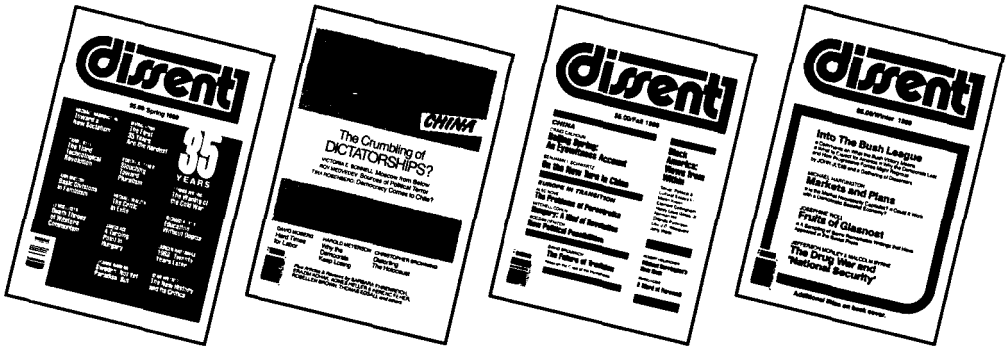

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Lighting candles at the steps of St. Wenceslas in Prague as hundreds of thousands of Czechoslovakians take to the streets. Donna Binder/IMPACT VISUALS

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Glasnost Watch

Irving Howe

A NEW POLITICAL SITUATION

Revolutionary Changes in the World

The recent political changes in Europe are so extensive, indeed, so astonishing that all of us have "fallen behind" in our thinking. It's unavoidable. So let me here put down some quite obvious points, with no pretense to originality or comprehensiveness, in order to provide a basis for discussion. I will number them for easy reference.

1. The changes now occurring in the Soviet Union—these constitute the enabling basis for the changes in Eastern Europe—are of a magnitude such as no one predicted. There is still, thank heaven, surprise in history. Theories of totalitarianism that were valuable or suggestive a few decades ago are of little use today. That a proposal for a multiparty regime should even be discussed by a committee of the Soviet legislature, though it's not likely to be enacted right away; that political-intellectual debates concerning the Soviet past, including the role of the once untouchable Lenin, rage in the Soviet press; that laws proposing the abolition of censorship are on the agenda; that the Soviet foreign minister should openly declare the invasion of Afghanistan to have been illegal and immoral (can you imagine a U.S. Secretary of State saying that about Vietnam?); that the Donetz miners were able to strike and win; that national minorities in the Soviet republics can freely agitate for independence; that dissident political organizations have been formed throughout the country—all remarkable!

The question may therefore arise: What kind of society is the Soviet Union today? A good question, but one that needn't be answered right away. There's not much use in applying the usual political-sociological labels; everything is in flux; the sensible thing is to watch without preconceptions. Theories can wait.

But let me venture a speculation. Despite all the theories positing a dark night of the soul in Stalinist and post-Stalinist Russia—and there was plenty of darkness!—it now seems as if, somehow, a strand or a trace of socialist and/or democratic idealism survived there through the decades. (This marks one important difference of origins between the Nazi and Stalinist forms of totalitarianism.) The very fact that an interesting discussion is taking place in the Soviet Union on whether or not it can or should be called socialist, with some bold theorists asserting that it should not be, indicates that there may be some basis for my speculation.

2. A major consequence or accompaniment of these developments is the virtual winding down of the cold war. (Pitiable is the word for the nostalgia expressed by some in the Bush administration for the good old days of the cold war.) And it's quite clear what the outcome of the cold war has been: a decisive victory for the West (in part for democratic capitalism, in part for social democratic welfare states, with the relative weights of these two still to be determined).

Why?

- The two most powerful political ideas these last few decades have been democracy and nationalism. *Most powerful of all: the two combined.*
- The decline of the Soviet and East European economies suggests that a centralized command economy can function with even a modicum of success only if it employs outright terror or a severe authoritarianism. Remove such political constraints even partially and the inherent contradictions and flaws of the command economy are revealed.
- Expectations that "Third World" ideologies—Castroite or populist-nationalist—would exert a powerful appeal have been disappointed. Today Castroite Cuba, once admired by many naive leftists, is one of the most regressive communist nations.
- The Western economies, despite recurrent

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(sometimes severe) crises, have shown considerable resilience. In part, this is due to social democratic reforms and Keynesian measures often initiated by the European democratic left. Still, we should be honest about this. Right now, democratic capitalism is in a relatively advantageous position, and for many people in Eastern Europe it has an understandable appeal.

3. Much—in a sense, just about everything—depends on the outcome of *perestroika,* and this, of course, is very chancy. One detects a nasty *Schadenfreude* among certain "sophisticated" analysts, even in some liberal publications, regarding the likely failure of Gorbachev's reforms—to say nothing of a sinister desire/expectation in some Washington circles (Eagleburger, Cheney) who prefer the known evils (to them comforts?) of the cold war to the unmeasured possibilities of a more-or-less successfully reformed Soviet Union.

I say more-or-less because even modest economic improvement should suffice to preserve the dynamic of Gorbachev's changes and to prevent the much-rumored military-bureaucratic coup. No economic or social policy ever succeeds entirely: not in the East, not in the West. Grim as the current economic situation is in the Soviet Union, it would be quite as foolish to suppose disaster there to be inevitable as it was a few decades ago to declare that capitalism had entered its "final crisis." Perhaps there is no "final crisis."

No one knows what the economic outcome will be in the Soviet Union, but if we had an administration in Washington not committed in about equal parts to conservatism and somnolence, it would be doing its best to help Gorbachev with the Soviet economy—if for no other reason than that such a policy would almost certainly be conducive to world peace. But, as Leon Wieseltier has remarked, President Bush is not in the mood for history, and his advisers are busy watching his popularity ratings in the polls.

4. A coup removing Gorbachev would be a disaster for the Soviet people and for the world at large. It would probably signal a return to authoritarianism (party/military junta?) in the USSR, the resumption of the cold war and the arms race, and the breakdown of efforts toward a united, democratic Europe. Let's be clear: Gorbachev is not "our" man. He is not, so far as we can tell, a liberal or a democrat; but liberals and democrats, as well as democratic socialists, have a stake in at least his partial success. Partial would be enough, and then there might be new leaders, new forces propelling the Soviet Union toward greater freedom.

Sympathetic as we are to the aspirations of national and ethnic groups oppressed by Moscow, we hope that their agitation will not reach a point where it sets off armed conflict or Russian chauvinist backlash. A sense of timing is required here.

5. A major change in European politics now seems final: The communist movement is exhausted, in a state of extreme, probably terminal crisis, torn apart by inner divisions and major defections. In France the Communist party (CP) has been driven into a sectarian corner. In Italy the CP, while suffering major problems, has transformed itself into something close to a social democratic party. In Hungary, the CP has rechristened itself as a "Socialist party," while losing a large portion of its membership.

We have lived to see the end of Stalinism/communism as a serious political force, everywhere except in a few underdeveloped countries. This means that, fairly soon if not immediately, there should be new opportunities for social democratic parties.

6. In Poland and Hungary the communists, until recently possessing absolute power, have now ceded significant portions of their rule—though in both countries the *nomenklatura* (party-state-industrial bureaucracy) still survives as a force. These parties are intellectually discredited, politically bankrupt—and what's more, recognize themselves as such. Remarkable transitions in these countries are occurring peacefully, thereby calling into question the neoconservative (Kirkpatrick) thesis that there could not be a peaceful transition from communist power to democracy such as occurred from fascist to democratic regimes in Spain and Greece. (When Kirkpatrick acknowledges that she was mistaken, *Dissent* will be among the first to let the world know.)

What will replace the communist regimes is an open question. In Poland Solidarity is almost certain to be torn—perhaps torn apart—between its presence in the new government and its obligations as a trade union. The reconstruction of shattered economies will require the shutting down of obsolete industries, with major loss of employment; if Solidarity, either through the government or as a union, fails to provide a safety net for these displaced workers, it will suffer serious losses, possibly to the former "official" unions, which, in the new circumstances, have already made some gains and displayed a certain militancy.

7. *As these notes are being written, the upheaval in East Germany grows in extent and depth. It seems—so far—the most widespread of the popular revolts in Eastern Europe. Hundreds of thousands of*

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people have been demonstrating in the East German cities, with a deeper spontaneous energy than anything shown elsewhere. These upheavals, at a moment when the opposition in East Germany still has to create itself as an organized force, will remind some of us of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of spontaneity—that in certain historical circumstances the masses act on their own, with little or no leadership and without the dubious blessings of a "vanguard." By the time you read these remarks, we will know better whether the East German regime can survive the crisis. If it does, that will be possible only through deep-going reforms that must undermine its monopoly of power.

8. One likely consequence of the remarkable events in Poland and Hungary, especially among younger people, may be a turning away from politics entirely, in favor of "American-style" diversions: sports, music, clothes, all accompanied by a deep skepticism and disdain for political agendas and ideas. Quite understandable: people are fed up with rhetoric, slogans, programs. They have a right to their skepticism. Europe is going through a postrevolutionary or post–counterrevolutionary period (it's not always possible to tell one from the other). It would be naive to suppose that after shaking off the communist dictatorships, with their misappropriation of the socialist vocabulary, people will quickly turn to new social innovations and experiments. There may instead be a strong desire for stability, peace, rest. But will circumstances allow this?

9. Within Poland and to a lesser extent Hungary there has been a notable shift to the right among former dissidents. Some Polish intellectuals are evidently infatuated with the notion of a Thatcherite laissez-faire economy. One can understand why, after decades of suffering from a sclerotic command economy. But if anything like laissez-faire is actually undertaken, severe social strife is bound to follow.

There is much talk in Poland and Hungary, as also in the West, about a "free market." But what does that actually mean? Right now, it serves as a portmanteau term for a variety of possible social arrangements. It can be a code word for pure-and-simple capitalism such as exists nowhere in the world. It can refer to schemes, not very precise at this point, for "market socialism"—an idea not likely to flourish in the present East European climate, especially in poverty-stricken Poland. Or it can mean a mixed economy, with a "social market"—some state-owned segments, some cooperatives, some private enterprise. Probably, the mixed economy is the most realistic option; more probably, the current talk about the "free market" mirrors confusion and uncertainty as to what should be done next.

If, through free elections, the people of Poland or Hungary—who, it should be recalled, never chose communist rule but had it imposed on them by force—were to opt for a return to capitalism, socialists would regret this choice but would support the right of these peoples to make it. If you believe in democracy, you must accept its outcomes. But socialists would also need to argue against such a choice and to warn of likely pitfalls.

10. One possible—by now, probable—consequence of all these developments is a new alignment of political forces in Europe. The question of a reunified Germany takes on a new urgency, not immediately perhaps, but within several years. (German Social Democrats have made an interesting proposal for a federation of the two Germanies as a transition to unity.) Also on the agenda is the idea of a federation, formal or informal, of Central European states. (Seven or eight years ago the Hungarian writer George Konrad suggested this in a conversation, and I thought he was being "utopian." Well, he was, but in the best sense of that term. Without a utopian element, there can be no useful politics.)

In the European parliament, soon to have enlarged powers, the largest political bloc will consist of the Social Democrats in tacit alliance with the Italian Communists. (The latter are apparently seeking closer informal relations with the Socialist International—as may a number of East European groups in the next few years.) If the European Social Democrats show even a touch of imagination, they will see that the ferment in Eastern Europe offers them fresh opportunities for creating a continent-wide bloc of the democratic left (Social Democrats, Greens, new groups in Eastern Europe whatever their names). Workers' rights could thereby be protected against an increasingly mobile international capital, but still more, a whole new socio-political climate might emerge.

Does this seem far away? Perhaps; but think of the enormous changes that have already occurred these past few years.

11. Whatever the new political alignments in Europe, and whatever the rapidity with which the two main blocs—NATO and the Warsaw Pact—come to seem irrelevant, we can say with a certain confidence that as long as there isn't a coup in Moscow, the threat of a nuclear war is not, of course, eliminated, but greatly reduced. One would accordingly hope that the Bush administration would show

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a greater responsiveness to the possibilities for mutual reductions of arms and for cutting a swollen military budget.

12. Let us bear in mind that the partly real and partly apparent strength of capitalism today is a *relative* one. It looks healthy by comparison to the communist states. But remember also that it is only some twenty years since several of the major capitalist nations (the United States, France) were wracked by severe social crisis. It is only a few years since the United States suffered a recession not very different from a depression. In several of the capitalist democracies, unemployment continues at intolerable heights. In the United States there are terrible social problems: decaying cities, a growing underclass, large-scale poverty, the drug epidemic, social pathology and dislocation, and so on. About none of these has the Bush administration made the faintest effort at solution—its only urgent socioeconomic proposal has been to cut the capital gains tax, which would further widen the already scandalous maldistribution of income and wealth. Two right-wing administrations in the United States have left a legacy of enormous structural deficits and trade imbalances; wild and sterile takeovers in place of economic development; deterioration of the industrial base, and so on.

As the cold war winds down, the tensions and conflicts within "the West" (in which category Japan must now be included) will probably intensify. The emergence of the European Economic Community poses a potential challenge to U.S. economic power, as the success of the Japanese economy poses an immediate threat. Meanwhile, the internationalization of capital makes it increasingly difficult for unions to protect workers and calls into question the continued effectiveness of the Keynesian financial measures and social democratic reforms upon which the prosperity of the West during the post-war years has in part been based.

Notions about the permanent stabilization of liberal capitalism (to say nothing abut the nonsense regarding "the end of history") are wildly optimistic at best, and simply fatuous at worst. Breakdown, conflict, struggle: all are intrinsic to social life, and even if tomorrow communism were wiped off the earth, these would still be with us.

13. In America we are saddled with an administration that seems to be without any serious convictions—apart from the need to cut capital gains taxes. The White House shows no interest in trying to cope with domestic social problems, and it shows little capacity for recognizing the enormous historical opportunities offered by recent European events. There are some hopeful signs—the recent election of a number of black mayors, the growing assertiveness of American women in defending their right to choose whether or not to have abortions. But we are still suffering from the massive sleeping sickness that is a Reagan legacy. Who today can believe the United States is the leading political force in the world?

14. For people on the democratic left there are grounds for both optimism and pessimism.

The optimism concerns the future of Europe. Imagine a Soviet Union that has managed to solve *some* of its economic problems, perhaps with help from the West, and which has taken a few more steps toward democracy. Several years ago this would have seemed a sheer fantasy; today, however one rates the prospects for *perestroika*, it is at least a significant possibly. Imagine further an Eastern Europe that (except for Albania) follows the paths of Poland and Hungary. Imagine, again, the possibilities for some sort of compact in behalf of incremental social progress across the European continent, marked first of all by major disarmament, and then by help to Third World nations, protection of workers threatened by multinational corporations, ecological steps shared by many nations, and so on. All of this suggests that there is a good possibility for a social democratic path in Europe—toward the spread and strengthening of welfare states, even if some of the participants use other political labels.

My short-run pessimism concerns the idea of socialism. Alas, we continue to pay for the crimes of Stalinism. That for half a century now we socialists have been persistent and principled critics of the totalitarian states and their command economies—who except a few people on the left and some scholarly types know this? For vast numbers of people in Europe "socialism" means what they have lived under or seen in Russia and Eastern Europe. And if indeed *that* is socialism, they are quite right to reject it utterly. We may cry out—as we have and will continue to—that this is not socialism, it is a violation and travesty of socialism; but right now there is a groundswell of sentiment rejecting "socialism" because of its alleged failures in Eastern Europe. It is a bitter irony that we should continue to pay for the crimes of Stalinism.

But we shall persist in trying to advance and develop fresh versions of the socialist idea, now often called "market socialism"—though that is a concept which needs study and elaboration, we must not reduce it to a mere slogan. We will continue to offer fundamental criticisms of the status quo, drawing upon socialist values though not necessarily confined to socialist positions.

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Politics in the modern world is extremely volatile; moods change quickly; the present political-ideological atmosphere could easily be transformed in a few years. If the developments that I've tried to sketch out occur in Europe, then there is a possibility that a new generation of thinkers will emerge to give the idea of democratic socialism a new urgency and strength. Meanwhile, as we watch the events in Europe with amazement and hope, there is plenty of work to do. And *Viva* Prague □

Gavril Popov

PERESTROIKA AND THE PRIMACY OF POLITICS

Gavril Popov is a distinguished Soviet economist, editor of the prestigious monthly Voprosy ekonomiki, *and a leading proponent of radical political and economic reforms in the USSR. Elected deputy to the Congress of People's Deputies in March of 1989, Popov has urged that the liberal deputies (estimated to comprise at least 450 and possibly even 800 of the 2,250 members) constitute themselves into a distinct political group, something on the order of a "loyal opposition." This essay will appear in the forthcoming* Perestroika: Chronicle of a Revolution, *edited by Abraham Brumberg (Pantheon Books)—A.B.*

Alec Nove (*Dissent*, Fall 1989) is right to emphasize the crucial and long-term connection between the economic and political institutions in the USSR. The contrived and—as the historical record demonstrates—feckless nature of that relationship arose because rather than making the economy the bedrock of a new political system, we did precisely the opposite. And an economy subordinated to the exigencies of politics is incapable of meeting the needs of a society.

The first efforts at economic reform, introduced in 1985–86, have led me—and others—to three conclusions: First, that what our country needs is not reform but fundamental economic restructuring—that is to say, a new economic system. Second, that the new economic system requires a political system that is congruous with it. And third, that further economic reorganization is impossible without radical changes in our political institutions.

These simple propositions concerning the interrelationship between economics and politics frequently elicit reactions from Soviet citizens ranging from stupefaction to anger. It might be useful, therefore, especially for the benefit of the foreign reader, to examine the reasons for this response.

We have grown up in a country whose political structures arose independently of and indeed without regard to the economic base, and which have in fact served as the principal instrument determining and shaping our economic institutions. In time, the political structures coalesced into what I have called elsewhere the administrative system,* with its powerful and bloated bureaucracy, arbitrary rule, a string of "personality cults," and inherent constraints on scientific, technical, and, above all, economic progress.

The defects and outrages of the administrative system have gradually seeped into public consciousness. It is not surprising, therefore, that any suggestion to concentrate on political institutions is met with bewilderment. Again political considerations first and above all? Are we to focus once more on shell rather than substance, albeit this time in the name of democracy and *perestroika*? Are we again to put the cart before the horse?

This article was translated from the Russian by Josephine Woll and Abraham Brumberg and annotated by Brumberg.

* Popov coined the term "administrative system" in an essay published in *Nauka i zhizn* in 1984. It has come to be used by many Soviet writers for the ruling machine created by Stalin and not fully dismantled to this day.

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These are not mere theoretical questions. They derive from bitter practical experience. True, in the past our political leaders occasionally tried to introduce new economic policies or changes in our economic mechanisms. But the emphasis was almost invariably on technology—that is, now on developing chemical industry, now on land improvement through drainage or irrigation, now on shifts in our military production. All of these efforts, each valid in its own way, came to nothing: resources were invested and used in a fundamentally ill-conceived and ineffective system. The *kolkhoz* [collective farm], for example, constituted a kind of one-way pump, draining resources from the countryside and incapable of providing sustenance to the countryside. Attempts to organize the flow of resources back through the pump to the countryside led only to squandering them in every direction.*

Economists like myself had pointed a finger at the politicians as the primary source of our economic woes. Yet we considered our economic structure the only possible model of a socialist economy. And we were never at a loss to support this assumption with apposite quotations from Marx, Engels, and Lenin.

But the abortive results engendered by the succession of political administrations—Stalin, Malenkov, Khrushchev-Bulganin, Khrushchev alone, Brezhnev-Kosygin, Brezhnev alone—and the failure of the various "scientific and technological" solutions led us to the conclusion that the source of our problems lay not in these programs and not even in the personalities of the leaders, nor in the *apparat*—in a word, not in the realm of politics at all, but somewhere deeper, precisely in the kind of economic structure that we had fashioned with the help of the administrative system.

The Case for Economic Reform First

Thus a new wisdom came into being: the real problem, it said, lies not in the leadership, not in the merits or shortcomings of this or that research institute, not in the structure of governmental bodies, not in the method of rule, but rather in an economy driven not by economic laws and considerations but by a strictly political-administrative engine. Hence, the economy must take precedence over everything else. If the latter is not altered, political changes will be mere tinsel. If the base isn't changed, all our energy will again be diverted into doomed "chemicalization" campaigns or land-improvement schemes. The very fate of *perestroika*, it seemed, hung on the ability to overhaul our economic system.

The agenda seemed disarmingly simple. First get rid of institutions such as the social consumption funds (for education, health, and the like), which are available at virtually no cost to those working in the *apparat*, and the various institutions that under the pretense of devising and running a coordinated planning system have been little more than a feeding trough for millions of bureaucrats. In other words, eliminate the economic foundations of a parasitic class that impedes progress. Develop new economic structures. Feed and clothe the nation. Instruct it in the art of economic self-sufficiency. And only after this work is done introduce democratic changes in the political superstructure. Such changes would then be both logical and durable: implemented gradually, they would inspire neither social unrest nor ridicule. A person who is fed and clothed is receptive to democratic rights. Who knows! Presented with a long list of candidates running for office, he or she might even cast a vote for socialism.

This is in fact how capitalism developed. In the course of successful bourgeois revolutions, while the bourgeoisie proclaimed the supremacy of all freedoms, it actually imposed restrictions in the area of politics and ideology. Only after the capitalist economic base had been firmly established did political democracy begin to flourish.

Faced with such compelling arguments, it seems audacious to advocate an opposite course: political changes first, economic restructuring later. For how, some people would ask, can we embark on political reforms in an economy of scarcity? What use can a nation make of greater political rights if it is forced to spend hours standing on lines? What can democracy offer under such conditions? Moreover, any attempt to introduce sweeping political changes might well result either in an elemental uprising "from below" directed at the *apparat* and nullifying the whole *perestroika* program or from the *apparat*, which having long ago mastered the art of manipulation would now emasculate the new democratic institutions and remain firmly in the saddle.

We have, after all, some experience with a bureaucracy bent on eradicating every sprout of democracy. When collective farms were first established in the 1920s, they were supposed to be

* For years, the *kolkhoz* has been used as a source for feeding the city; forced deliveries, corvées, and legislation tying the peasant to the land all caused the countryside to sink into economic and social misery. Attempts to build roads and hospitals or to provide children with adequate schooling usually come to naught—A.B.

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run strictly on a *khozraschet* [self-accounting, or financing] basis. In addition, they disposed of considerable democratic freedoms. *Kolkhoz* members fought hard at every election for "their" chairman and governing board as against those nominated from above. Yet after a while the interest in elections subsided. When and why? When wages were guaranteed from above—when, in other words, financial accountability was, for all intents and purposes, done away with. If the *kolkhoz* employee has the basic part of his salary guaranteed "from the top," regardless of the results of the work of the entire working force, it is the top that will in effect be running the farm, elections or no elections. Which is to say that democratic institutions built on authoritarian economic foundations are just a facade.

Let us take a leap into the present. According to the new rules, workers in an enterprise are now supposed to elect their directors. And elections have indeed been taking place. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that only in those enterprises—factories, shops, cooperatives—where *khozraschet* is the norm, where workers have a real stake in productivity, is there a keen interest and participation in the election process. Where self-financing is a mere formality, the elections serve either as a means of settling personal accounts, or they elicit widespread apathy—surely yet another example of the extent to which democratic forms depend on economic realities.

The Case for Political Reform First

There is a good case, then, to be made for placing the emphasis on economic reforms. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that political reforms must be our number one priority now.

This is so, first of all, because of the peculiarities of our current phase of economic reorganization. Every attempt to implement a more radical model of *khozraschet* immediately meets fierce resistance on the part of the economic and party *apparat*. Efforts to temper or overcome this resistance have thus far met with little success, which strongly suggests that unless the very nature of that apparatus is changed, that is, unless it is replaced with a body of officials directly responsible to the electorate and genuinely interested in implementing a radical economic overhaul, the reforms will remain a dead letter. Workers have in many cases taken matters into their own hands, but without the democratization of party and political bodies their efforts are doomed.

Let me offer a few examples. In a northern Siberian city workers at a public transportation depot chose a Moscow specialist as their director. The new man asked the city executive committee to repair some broken machinery for which it was contractually responsible: the depot—as a self-financing enterprise—found the cost of repairs prohibitive. The city fathers regarded this legitimate demand as outlandish and brushed it off. Our director retaliated by canceling several bus and tram routes. One might think that he won. Unfortunately not. The city executive committee took the name of this insubordinate troublemaker off the list of apartment-allocations, thus forcing him to choose between his family and his job.

There are thousands of ways to sabotage an economic planner who relies on his "legal" rights. At the end of August 1988, for instance, a district party committee (*raikom*) asked the director of a bus factory for buses to pick up children at a Young Pioneers camp. The director refused: "I can't," he said, "I'm on *khozraschet* and without a contract signed beforehand I can't do anything. But it's the end of the month, we're finishing up our orders—if you wait until tomorrow there will be buses available." Not good enough: within two hours inspectors from the Motor Vehicle Bureau were standing on every corner outside the factory, checking the license of every single driver and taking down the plate number of every vehicle. The director got the picture and—orders notwithstanding—sent his buses off to the *raikom*. "The hell with your Motor Vehicle People," he concluded, "and the hell with your *khozraschet* too."

Examples abound. And they all point to one conclusion: because the process of dismantling the fetters to progress has been directed almost exclusively at the economic system, the latter, too, is incapable of functioning properly.

It is instructive to recall that Lenin himself regarded political reform as essential for successful economic reform. Millions of Soviet citizens repeat this axiom at school examinations, millions nearly choke on quotations from Lenin. But we are loath to apply this fundamental principle to our current problems. And yet time and again it is precisely the hurdles thrown in our way by the party-state machinery that prevent us from undertaking decisive measures in the economy.

How can a crew meet its contractual obligations when it has pared away all its superfluous workers yet is expected to provide a couple of men to clear snow? How can a factory become truly self-financing if hiring and firing decisions are made not by its manager but by the party? The chairman of an

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*ispolkom** will no longer dare to scoff at a supervisor chosen by the work collective only when *ispolkom* elections themselves are democratic and a candidate who ignores the law on enterprises can be decisively rejected.** At this point *raikoms* still expect factories to produce volunteers to distribute vegetables, clean streets, and the like. That won't stop unless they begin to elect as leaders people who worry less about rotting vegetables *per se* and more about a rotten administrative apparatus that has never learned that vegetables should be distributed without regional depots and bureaucratic middlemen but on the basis of economic interests and contracts.

Thus complete and genuine *khozraschet* and viable economic reforms are possible only in the context of full-fledged democracy, in both the party and the government. In real life a director can't be split in two any more than a worker can. Half of a director can't sit submissively for two hours at a *raikom* meeting and listen obediently to officious rhetoric while the other half of him returns to his office at the plant and begins to perform miracles of productivity and self-sufficiency. Half of a worker can't applaud at a meeting, echoing ready-made slogans and dropping his ballot into the box without even reading it while the other half works as hard as he can on contract with his crew.

A person is a single entity. If we want people to take active, creative roles in the factory, in research institutes, in hospitals, in distributing vegetables or in a sports stadium, we must allow them to be equally active and creative in elections to the local soviet, in deciding what should happen to the atomic electric power station in the Crimea, in solving the fate of the Crimean Tatars or Nagorno Karabakh. And this can only happen after a radical reform of the party and government mechanism.

Apart from purely economic arguments, there are more general reasons. Fundamental restructuring must of necessity be a mass phenomenon. Both political democracy and internal party democracy are instruments aimed at bringing ever greater numbers of people into the processes of *perestroika*. The forms of such a democracy will change, but the main criterion must be to turn workers into the principal agents of reforms.

Democracy is not merely economically beneficial. It is a social good in itself, as well as an incentive to progress in general. At the present time, we find it impossible to bring about swift improvements in income and standard of living. But in the meantime there is something we can and must offer immediately—namely, democracy, the sense of being the master of our lives, of being able to make decisions for ourselves. Only then will we be able to overcome the onerous legacy of the past.

There is a marvelous line in Eduardo de Filippo's play about Aesop: don't trust anyone who passes judgment on whether someone is or is not ready for freedom. Such judgments sound like the unsuccessful fox, who comforts himself for not being able to reach the grapes by saying they are sour anyway. It is an excellent piece of advice. For the craving for freedom is a universal phenomenon, common even to people who do not fully realize it, or may think that they don't want it. Experience has taught us that all societies are ripe for democracy, for it is something that turns us into full human beings.

The agricultural reform of 1861 offers an interesting historical parallel.*** It is often forgotten that this reform—incomplete, partial, preceded by two decades of foot-dragging, implemented by the forces of the autocracy's bureaucratic *apparat*, conceived to defend the interests not so much of the landowners as of the autocracy and its *apparat*—within a year mandated not only economic but also political changes. Changes like the creation of the *zemstvos* [local rural self-governments], trial by jury, the rise of an independent judiciary, and so on. Why? Because the first problem to arise was where the newly freed serf could go to lodge a complaint against a landowner who contravened the 1861 reform, and solving that problem required eliminating the old patrimonial court system and creating a fundamentally different legal system.

A second historical parallel is connected with experiments in economic reform in socialist countries—in Hungary, for instance. Some of the opponents of *perestroika* point to them as a salutary lesson of how our reforms, too, may end up. To be sure, Hungary faces innumerable problems. But one must remember that for nearly twenty years, a whole

* The executive committee of a local soviet, the organ of state authority.

** The law on enterprises, enacted in 1987, is supposed to provide enterprises with the freedom to plan their own inputs and outputs on a strict cost-accounting basis, without interference from central ministries. Most Soviet economists as well as numerous enterprise managers are now agreed that the law left enough loopholes in it to permit the ministries to impose obligatory plans upon enterprises.

*** The reform of 1861, which abolished serfdom, nevertheless still deprived peasants of full civil (including property) rights, in fact making them completely dependent on the government bureaucracy. Other and more thorough reforms were enacted between 1864 and 1874.

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generation's lifespan, Hungary achieved something evidently beyond the grasp of an average Soviet citizen: a normal existence, without queues, with enough produce and goods to meet the basic demands of the population. Its present difficulties are the result not of its reformist path but because somewhere along the way the leadership wavered, dawdled, procrastinated, and failed to implement urgently needed measures. It is clear to me, for one, that Hungary's problems are rooted in the failure to restructure its heavy industry. And this failure stemmed precisely from the failure to restructure the party-government *apparat*, which objected to the industrial reforms because they would have undermined its power and privileges.

Yugoslavia is another case in point. Its problems are many and serious, yet anyone who has been both there and in the Soviet Union over the past ten or twenty years cannot but be struck by how much better and easier life is in Yugoslavia, especially considering the low economic level it started from. Yugoslavia's difficulties—again in my view—are rooted in its political system. I am convinced that its much and long-touted system of "self-government" (including workers' councils) was much more façade than substance.

We can also see that socialist countries that have implemented economic reforms without radically altering their political institutions can come to a bad end. The recent events in China are a striking illustration of that.

Finding the Right Blend

This much said, it is necessary to stress that however important democracy is in general terms, its actual form and shape are intimately bound up with the form and shape of the economic system it engenders. Which is to say that just as no viable economic institutions can be created without correspondingly viable political institutions, so the viability of the latter depend on that of the former.

Let me again turn to the experience of capitalism, which clearly tends to democracy. The reason for it is that capitalism rests fundamentally on the laborer's ability freely to trade his labor. He is free not only as a laborer but also as a consumer. Without this condition—which requires at a minimum all formal freedoms—there can be no real competition.

This seems like a self-evident proposition; nonetheless, Soviet textbooks on political economy

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contain not a word about freedoms as the main precondition for the flourishing of capitalist production. This becomes even more bizarre when one considers that it was precisely because the tzarist regime virtually ignored this proposition that capitalism in Russia developed so slowly and that the country was pushed toward revolution.

One of Stalin's blind spots—among so many others—was his failure to understand the way in which capitalism is tied to democracy. He refused to believe that the democratic bourgeois republics would oppose fascism. Rather, it was his article of faith that they would make common cause with fascist regimes. Hence his vacillations in negotiating with England and France, and hence the course of action that led to the pact with Hitler. As it turned out, England fought Hitler to the death—which is to say that it fought against a system that annulled the bourgeois freedom of competition and deprived workers of the right freely to hire out their labor, or to choose and quit jobs as they saw fit.

The Soviet Union paid an awesome price for Stalin's failure to understand the fundamental interrelationship of capitalism and democracy, of capitalism and fascism. Fascism was not the only possible and logical result of the development of capitalism, as Stalin thought, but just such a "defect" of capitalism's development as the "cult of personality" was a deformation of socialism: likely in a given confluence of circumstances, but not an inevitable outgrowth of the system.

While proceeding with political reforms, as we must, we should also keep in mind Poland's experience. Several years ago in Poland political freedoms outpaced economic reorganization; or put differently, economic changes did not keep pace with political changes. As a result, democratic institutions were used to channel mass dissatisfaction arising from the leadership's failure to implement structural economic reforms. Democracy without economic reorganization can lead to this outcome too. If economic reform somehow goes off the track, so will political reform.

To sum up, then, if it is true that economic reform cannot develop without political reform, the opposite is equally true. It is mandatory for us to proceed immediately with a drastic overhaul of our political system, while at the same time keeping in mind the kind of economic system we want to create. □

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Tzvetan Todorov

THE SATANIC VERSES IN PARIS

The passions unleashed by Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* seem at first glance to be a perfect example of what the novel itself identifies as postmodern sensibility, that of a society capable only of pastiche, which cultivates "the image instead of the reality." Millions of Muslims condemned the book without having read it, and hundreds of writers defended it, I believe, under these same conditions. Today, in the countries where the book appears in translation, the situation is a little different, but still peculiar: it is impossible to read it without the recent controversy in mind. Having finished the book, I find consolation in the fact that "affairs" such as the one it provoked are one of the book's principal themes. More than postmodern distortion, the affair is an illustration and a test of what the book itself tells us; the fact that the two, the book and the affair, have become inseparable is not necessarily a bad thing.

Banned in India, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia shortly after its publication in England (in late September 1988), the Rushdie novel attracted world attention after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death sentence against its author and its editor in February 1989, complete with a reward of $3 million dollars, in the great tradition of bounty hunting. This interdiction spread to other countries with large Muslim populations (Kenya, Senegal, and so on). In France, the ban won the support of a small part of the Muslim population and the "understanding" of several public figures. Jacques Chirac, mayor of Paris and unsuccessful candidate for France's presidency in 1988, declared that he had "no esteem for Rushdie nor for people who use blasphemy to make money." Albert Cardinal Decourtray, president of the Confederation of French Bishops, wished to make it known that he reserved his "solidarity" not for Rushdie but "for all those who, in dignity and prayer, suffer as a result of this wound" inflicted by the infamous book. Mohamed Arkoun, professor at the Sorbonne and occasionally at Princeton, characterized the expressions of indignation aroused by Khomeini's *fatwa* (Islamic legal ruling) as overreactions "based on an entirely unacceptable ideological postulate." According to him, defending human rights is "repeating colonial discourse, which legitimized the domination of other peoples and cultures by exporting the civilization developed in Europe."

What can be said about these declarations? Chirac and Decourtray are acting as politicians. They do not want to alienate the French Muslim population; they are worried about the effect of their words, not the truth of them. They never even opened the book, nor did their advisers, which is more serious. (Politicians are not expected to know how to analyze books but rather how to choose their aides.) It is also obvious that they contravene what they themselves proclaim to be their deepest convictions: the defense of individual rights on one hand, Christian charity on the other. Arkoun, however, does not have any political excuse. His position is, he says in the same interview, "scientific" (this term appears four times) and, more specifically, "semiological" (six times).

Does a doctrine's origin in time and space—say, eighteenth-century Europe—provide "scientific" refutation of its universality? And is it "scientific" to claim that the affirmation of human rights must be thought of "in the larger terms of the rights of God"?

The death penalty is barbaric. A death sentence on a foreign citizen is illegal. To call for murder—because that is exactly what this implies—is a crime. A Khomeini who claims to purify morals by bloodshed is not (was not) any less criminal than a Stalin who sent assassins all over the world to eliminate ideological or personal enemies. Theocracy, when animated by the conquering spirit, is pretty much the same as modern ideocracy, or totalitarianism. It is true that the destructive power possessed by these tyrants is not the same (although the ayatollahs must not be underestimated). But, as Rushdie remarks in his novel, fanaticism does not depend on the quantity of power at one's disposal.

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Rushdie's friends make but one argument: the right to free speech. The attack on this right represents "absolute evil" for President François Mitterrand (Chirac's successful rival). His minister of culture, Jack Lang, is quick to add, "Every book should have the right to be published and distributed." Writers who signed various petitions supporting Rushdie also invoked the freedom of opinion and the right of expression. Rushdie himself, in his letter addressed to Rajiv Gandhi after the book was proscribed in India, asks for the "right of free expression."

In the book, this position is equally represented, but it is not certain whether it is considered to be the voice of wisdom. The writer, Baal, embraces it by declaring, "I recognize no jurisdiction except that of my muse"—which does not prevent the city's leaders from cutting off his head. The measure is certainly excessive; it is still true that poets—in spite of what Baal might say, and, under other skies, Baudelaire—are not miraculously exempt from the common jurisdiction. No law can admit the principle of freedom without accompanying it with responsibility: I have the right to insult my neighbor, but he has the right to have me charged with defamation. (We judge Khomeini's *fatwa* to be illegal.) An episode during the affair illustrated this state of things. At a book fair in Geneva last April, Rushdie's book was not taken off the shelves, despite protests by the Iranians. The latter, in turn, decided to display *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the famous anti-Semitic forgery. However, the exhibition's management compelled them to remove it: the *Protocols* have been banned since 1988! It is not true, therefore, that people have the right to distribute *any* book.

In the same letter to Gandhi, Rushdie insists on the difference between fiction and history: mustn't one at least leave every liberty to the imagination? In the novel this position is upheld by Billy Battuta, the unscrupulous producer who is making a film about the Prophet. He declares that "fiction is fiction, facts are facts." Certainly, if we are trying to establish historical truth or submit evidence in a courtroom. But a writer of fiction is also engaged in a quest for truth—even if it is of a different nature; and Rushdie is even more correct when he writes, elsewhere, "I resort to literature to explore the highest and lowest points of human society and human spirit." Literature is certainly an exploration of the world; it is absurd to pretend that there is nothing in common between the religion represented in *The Satanic Verses* and historic Islam, or between Rushdie's fictional prophet, Mahound, and Mohammed, or between his verses and those of the Koran. In any case, the distinction between fiction and history concerns the relation of the text to the world; whereas it is the impact of the text on its readers that is in question in blasphemy or defamation. The *Protocols* are definitely fiction; if they are banned, it is not because what they say is not true (as is the case of all fiction) but because they cause evil.

Since the publication of Rushdie's book, dozens of people in India and in Pakistan have died in demonstrations against it. Everyone regrets these deaths. But should publication have been postponed to avoid them? Is freedom of speech worth, in this case, fifty lives? The position of Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian recipient of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, seems to me worthy of attention here. He commented on the *fatwa* in these terms: "Instigating murder is a crime and the Imam Khomeini should be punished for inciting Muslims to kill Rushdie." However, in December 1988 he interrupted, on his own initiative, the republication in serial form of his novel *The Children of Gebelawi*, which represents the three prophets as neighborhood toughs. . . . Should Rushdie have done as much?

The question is worth posing, especially if we insist that the writer not only enjoy freedom but also assume its responsibilities. But the answer, on my part, would be negative—since I read the book. Because Rushdie's remarkable novel is neither an insult to the devout nor an incitement to violence. It is, among other things, a personal reinterpretation of Islam, full of nuances and ambiguities, which should only provoke interrogation and meditation. If there were deaths in the streets of Islamabad or Bombay, they should not be attributed to the book, but to fanaticism and to the hate of the instigators of these demonstrations. If they had only read the book . . .; but no: I will say by way of shortcut that those who are capable of reading *The Satanic Verses* from cover to cover are not capable of calling for death in city streets. Rushdie was infinitely right to publish his book. I am not sure, on the other hand, that the Indian and Pakistani authorities were wrong to ban (for the time being) its distribution. They probably prevented other deaths.

Reading the Novel in this Context

The Satanic Verses makes us live the confrontation between the one and the many, between the community, in which collective truth is compulsory for the individual, and the society, in which each individual can search for truth in her or his own manner, between monolithic religion and infinitely varied literature, between prophets and poets, between The Book and books, between armed

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militants and unarmed man. At one moment Rushdie takes over the narrative—to tell us that he refuses to pronounce judgment openly about the heart of this conflict. Indeed, this is not the obligation of the novelist, who depicts rather than asserts. But it would be naive to rest with this declaration of neutrality. By its very existence, this novel militates in favor of novels, of plurality, of the rights of individuals to question traditions. It is not surprising, then, that an ayatollah in Iran, a cardinal in France, and a rabbi in Israel all came out, with more or less vehemence, against Rushdie. The prophet in the book says to a character named Salman, who dared to modify the sacred text: "Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven. . . . [You have] set your words against the Words of God!"

The Satanic Verses is also a book about the nature of good and evil. These two ideas confront each other not only as orthodoxy and heresy but also as the two main characters, Gibreel and Saladin. The former's head is surrounded by a halo, reminiscent of that of saints, and the latter watches with apprehension as small horns grow on his forehead and his feet are transformed into goat hooves. Yet at the end of the book Gibreel, who takes himself to be an archangel, perishes and Saladin, the humble sinner who is so human, escapes and starts a new life. Rushdie refuses to believe in a manichean vision of the world, where evil is a substance entirely foreign to human (or divine) nature. The world is made up of heterogeneous components, or, as he says, incompatible ones: "Ghosts, Nazis, saints all alive at the same time." Is that to say in essence that good and evil have become indiscernible, that everything is indifferently "angelicdevilish" or satanic-angelic? Rushdie seems to suggest this occasionally. Other times he corrects himself: "There were real monsters in the world—mass-murdering dictators, child rapists." One is tempted to add: ayatollahs who issue death sentences against writers who displease them. Not that their monstrosity is inhuman, far from it; but their guilt is much more clearly established than that, for example, of Mrs. Thatcher, amiably designated in the book as Mrs. Torture, and who today insures Rushdie's survival.

Finally, *The Satanic Verses* is, and is above all, a book about identity and change, loyalty and treason, particular cultures and contemporary universal mixing of races. Here, once again, Rushdie is not didactic. The two protagonists are accustomed to change because they are both actors, but they practice it in two opposite ways. Gibreel, specialist in the incarnation of Indian gods, already protean, nevertheless represents continuity, loyalty to India, and contempt for the foreign. Saladin, whose family name is Chamcha (an indirect descendant of Gregor Samsa, the hero of *The Metamorphosis*) is a man of a thousand accents, able to imitate any voice, including that of a ketchup bottle in a television commercial. He chooses to renounce his past, to scorn Indian *moeurs*, and to venerate the English and cosmopolitan culture. Should Ovid's metamorphoses be favored, in which forms change but the essence always remains the same, or that of Lucretius, in which change brings death to the old self? Saladin seems to prevail over Gibreel, Lucretius over Ovid, and the beginning and the end of the book proclaim that the old must die so that the new can be born. However, after Gibreel's death, Saladin decides to settle in India and to return to his past.

Rushdie himself must stay in England if he wants to survive, not to mention write and publish. Will the book's destiny invalidate the story told in the novel? On the one hand, the ayatollahs see Rushdie as a blasphemer in the pay of Zionist imperialism, participating in the occidental plot against the Third World. On the other, Rushdie himself wants "to give a voice and a literary flesh to immigrant culture." He projects himself as the spokesman of nationals of the former British Empire currently living in England. However, the aforementioned immigrants were insulted by him and burned his book in public. Would Saladin have seemed more true to life by staying in England?

The choice is perhaps a little more complicated than it appears. Rushdie seems to oppose fidelity to a tradition (be it as varied as that of India), to the omnivorous nature of London, to the cosmopolitan eclecticism of today, to the sort of mental "zapping" that we have learned to practice; inside all of us there are "more channels than a cable or satellite mogul ever dreamed of." The particular opposes itself here not to universality but to the mixture of several traditions, the agglutination of fragments, the hybrid patchwork. Now, universality does indeed exist, even if it does not directly appear in Rushdie's book; it is the horizon common to all quests for truth, including those conducted by way of the novel. Rushdie's homeland, besides the English language, is neither India nor England but, as for all great writers, in literature alone. It is no accident that it is democracy, of the European and North American type, that guarantees authors the right to write novels freely: democracy and the novel have the same conception of truth as a condition of inquiry, not as dogmatic certitude.

To which one could perhaps add: It is no accident either that the most compelling novels are written nowadays by authors born in Asia or Africa, Latin

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America or Eastern Europe. Being an Indian novelist living in London is therefore an almost ideal situation—save for several million Muslims calling for your death. □

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY SALLY BOYLE

Murray Hausknecht

BENSONHURST AND AUSCHWITZ

Last year, at about the time a young black man was killed on the streets of Bensonhurst, Cardinal Glemp, the Roman Catholic primate of Poland, abrogated an agreement to relocate a convent from the site of Auschwitz. Aside from being manifestations of ancient prejudices, the two events are tied by a common focus on the control of a place or, more accurately, control of the *meaning* of a territorial area. This common concern unites two seeming disparate events and helps us makes sense of them.

"Place" means not only territory but also social location. In Bensonhurst about half the residents are recent immigrants from Sicily and southern Italy, and the rest are mainly third- or fourth-generation Italian Americans. They are mostly blue-collar workers, and conventional social science wisdom, probably correct in this instance, stresses that they see themselves as competing for jobs with black workers in a local economy offering increasingly fewer opportunities for workers without skills. They are also an "insular" group attempting to maintain a way of life strongly emphasizing family and local social relationships. Like other ethnic groups in the same circumstances, they are deeply suspicious of "outsiders," that is, those who are not of their group.

In short, within the bounds of one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities there is a group whose traditionalistic culture and social organization locate it toward the margins of the city and the society as a whole.

Groups are located in physical spaces, and these spatial territories become social and cultural symbols—Harlem, Park Avenue, the other side of the tracks—both for others and for the groups who live there. Neighborhood boundaries separate "us" from "them." A stranger crossing the borders of a neighborhood, particularly an ethnic or racial one, is almost entering a family's home—the borders mark the limits of territorial and social space.

Unlike a family's home, however, a group's neighborhood is highly permeable; strangers who can be barred from a house or apartment constantly move along a neighborhood's streets and avenues. Some are more visible than others; some can be safely ignored; some are problematic. Among the latter are those who are brought into the neighborhood by high school students and young adults beginning their work careers. At work and in school strangers can become friends—sometimes boyfriends and girlfriends who are invited into the neighborhood and the home.

In ethnic groups where the old traditions are still strong, people are particularly alert to the friendships young women form. In such communities marriage as a matter of individual choice is not as firmly established as in conventional middle-class communities. A young woman who brings an outsider home is easily seen as flouting tradition and defying the authority of the family.

It is not surprising, then, that the immediate cause of the assault on Yusuf Hawkins was the belief that he was the new boyfriend of one of the local young women. A black man on the streets of Bensonhurst is the archetypal stranger; it is impossible to see him as a member of the group. In our society the black man is the most "unfriendly" of strangers; he is not only an economic competitor for many but, given the mythology of American racism, a powerful sexual competitor. He is seen as a threat to material self-interest, images of masculinity, and the social integrity of the group. When Yusuf Hawkins entered Bensonhurst, to look at a used car, he was, in the eyes of the group, a transgressor of its home grounds and, as the presumed boyfriend of one of its women, a violator of the inner precincts of the group's life.

Auschwitz is another physical space that cannot be thought of apart from its social and cultural significance. Auschwitz is a synecdoche for the Holocaust; although many others, including non-Jewish Poles, were murdered there, it has become, through one of history's more morbid paradoxes, a Jewish space.

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Thus, within the national boundaries of Poland there exists a place that in the eyes of the world "belongs" to the great stranger of European history.

It is this meaning of Auschwitz that is clearly important to Cardinal Glemp, who said:

> The Carmelite sisters living next to the camp at Oswiecism wanted and want to be a sign of the solidarity among people that embraces both the living and the dead. Do you, esteemed Jews, not see that your pronouncements against the nuns offend the feelings of all Poles, and our sovereignty, which has been achieved with such difficulty?

For Cardinal Glemp to say "Pole" is to say "Catholic"; those who demonstrated at the site offended not *Catholic* feelings but "the feelings of all Poles." Still, it is not simply "feelings" that are at issue, since the demonstration also offended "our sovereignty, which has been achieved with such difficulty." The cardinal is speaking here not only as a Catholic prelate but also as a Polish nationalist. That is, from this perspective Auschwitz, as a site perceived as "belonging" to the Jews, has the same significance to the Polish nation as those areas of Poland that were once conquered and held by such historic enemies as Germany and Russia: Auschwitz is an area that must be recovered.

Auschwitz also has a religious meaning to this conservative cardinal. For pious, conservative Catholics the continued existence of the Jewish faith can be seen as an implicit questioning of the church's claim to be a universal, all-inclusive religion. By the same token, Auschwitz, as a symbolically Jewish place, can be taken as continual reminder of a "denial" of the church's claim. One way to combat this perceived challenge is to establish, if only symbolically, Catholic hegemony over the site and thus wrest it from its Jewish "ownership." Thus, locating a convent there and erecting a twenty-three-foot cross whose shadow falls on the site serves to reclaim it both for the church and for the nation.

Cardinal Glemp, of course, is not representative of the Roman Catholic church. The agreement to relocate the convent was negotiated with the aid of French and Belgian cardinals along with a Polish cardinal; leading members of the American episcopate publicly expressed disagreement with his views; and, finally, the Pope himself forced Cardinal Glemp to retreat. What distinguishes Cardinal Glemp is a cast of mind that resembles in some crucial respects that of people in Bensonhurst. They share a perspective characteristic of the dark, ethnocentric side of nationalism and ethnicity. It celebrates the traditional, resists new ideas, and divides the world into "us" and hostile strangers to be treated warily and with suspicion. But those who hold to this perspective in Poland and Bensonhurst are under pressure from larger social and cultural forces.

In Bensonhurst these forces are education, visions of social mobility, the mass media, and the lures of the culture of consumerism. Especially for the young, they are assimilative social and cultural forces. At the same time there remains a strong attachment to the familiar and, in many ways, still satisfactory way of life. To repel the stranger from the precincts of neighborhood and home is one way of resolving ambivalence. It is an easy response to fall into because it draws upon the traditional hostility to all strangers now reinforced by the easily acquired, deep-seated prejudices of our society.

The Roman Catholic church of Poland has been under the pressure of a Communist regime since the end of World War II. In the conflict with the regime the church became an opposition rallying point, and the struggle submerged the internal conflicts characteristic of Catholicism since Vatican II. Now, however, as Poland emerges from Communist dominance, the Polish church will experience pressures of a different kind.

New economic forces and the free circulation of once suppressed political and cultural ideologies will make the church, as a religious institution, more vulnerable to the challenges of secularism. It will also become increasingly vulnerable to the "liberal" ideas that have affected the conservative forces within other Catholic churches. For example, the identification of nationality with religion, which served the church and dissident groups so well before the triumph of Solidarity, will probably begin to dissolve—"Pole" will no longer be the automatic equivalent of "Catholic." The more Poland comes to resemble liberal democratic societies, religion in Poland will experience the same external and internal challenges Catholicism is experiencing in the West.

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Cardinal Glemp surely welcomes the new freedom, but it is not hard to imagine that the new political structure and its inevitable social changes arouse anxiety about their possible impact on the church. Indeed, his actions may have been a response to just this sense of a change in the political and social climate of Poland and a sense that it had to be guarded against.

Cardinal Glemp and others in his church may be experiencing an ambivalence like that of the working-class Italian Americans of Bensonhurst. His renunciation of the agreement to remove the convent from the site of Auschwitz may be understood as a response aimed at maintaining the existing powerful position of the Polish church and fighting against newly emerging forces that challenge present policies and perspectives.

Brooklyn streets are far from the site of an extermination camp, but they become somewhat similar places when ancient biases are used to cope with problems of social and political change. □

Andrew J. Perrin

CAMP SOLIDARITY IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

OCTOBER 1989

The night is cold and damp as our weary group finishes a day-long drive. We follow the beaten pickup through back roads for several miles, then up a winding dirt road. We pass a check-in point staffed by camouflage-clad volunteers and finally arrive at the camp. No, this is not South Africa or El Salvador; it's "Camp Solidarity" in Saint Paul, Virginia, a small coal-mining town in rural southwest Virginia.

The similarities are not lost on the United Mine Workers (UMWA), who have been on strike against the Pittston Coal Group/Clinchfield Coal Company since April 5, 1989. Before that, they worked more than fourteen months without a contract. The National Labor Relations Board found Pittston guilty of unfair labor practices, paving the way for the strike. In the first six months, the strike has had 100 percent participation; not a single miner has crossed the picket line to return to work. Pittston has been bringing in "replacement workers" ("We got another name for them [scabs]," says Jim, a UMWA miner) since the beginning of the strike. Production, though, has stayed consistently around 30 percent of normal, despite Pittston's predictions that by October the mines would be producing near 100 percent.

The atmosphere in the area is reminiscent of the original UMWA organizing in earlier years. One-third of Virginia's state troopers are stationed in the three sparsely populated counties affected by the strike. In addition, Pittston has hired Vance Security's Asset Protection Team, a riot-control force, to stand guard at entrances to the mines. And many federal marshals are in the area to enforce a federal court's injunction barring interference with the normal business of the mines. Says Jack, a miner who owns the property where "Camp Solidarity" is located, "You hear about police states in communist countries . . . what we have is a police state right here in Southwest Virginia . . . it shows you how the companies can control the government; that's a dangerous situation in America or anywhere."

The miners have successfully made the connection between Pittston and governmental neglect of labor. A brochure circulated by the UMWA features a cartoon showing a big building labeled "Pittston" and two large Virginia State Troopers dragging camouflage-clad strikers away. The caption reads: "And they call it Democracy." Another cartoon at the camp shows President Bush welding a tiny crack in a giant Iron Curtain while miners restrained behind a giant "Pittston" sign cry, "Hey George, what about workers' rights over here?" Samuel Skeens, a miner who was staffing the District 28 UMWA office when we arrived, admonished us to be wary: "Constitution don't go down here."

The miners are using nonviolent civil disobedience to combat scab labor and Pittston. The miners sit in the entrances to coal mines and processing plants, blocking scab-driven trucks from entering and exiting. In September, they occupied the Moss 3 processing and separating plant, holding it for more than three days before leaving peacefully. A federal judge has issued an injunction prohibiting the actions; fines from the combination of federal and state contempt-of-court charges are staggering. But the miners are determined to continue; "Civil disobedience is the best thing that's come around here," claimed one striking miner.

Formally, the issue in the strike is health and pension benefits for Pittston's miners. After the UMWA agreed on a contract with the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association (the coal industry's collective bargaining organization), Pittston withdrew from the agreement, cutting off health and pension benefits to widows, disabled miners, and retirees. The last contract expired on January 31, 1988.

Clearly, though, this is not primarily a strike for economic benefits; one miner commented, "I'm not striking for 1,700 miners. I'm striking for the whole United States." Another said, "Now I'm not a

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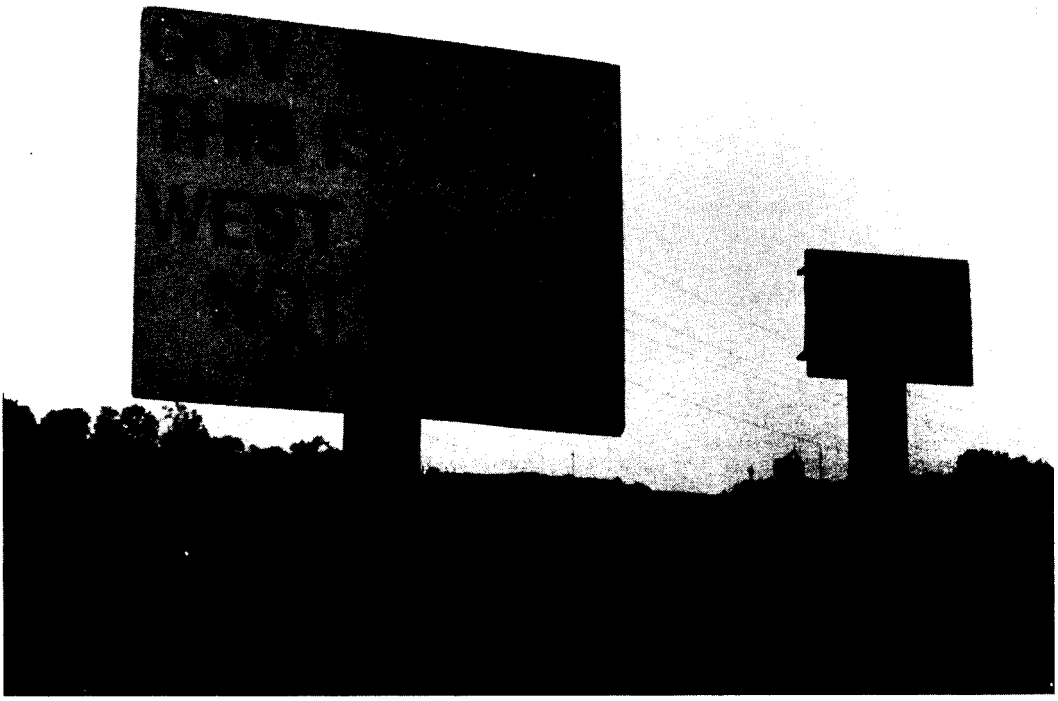

Entrance to the Moss 3 Coal Processing Plant. Photo by Andrew Perrin

radical. I'm fairly conservative. I voted for [then Virginia governor] Baliles in the last election because I thought he was for the working man. . . . I feel betrayed . . . ." The sense of betrayal by state and country is widespread among the strikers; said one, "I've learned more in the past six months than in the past forty-odd years. . . . I know it sounds strange, but it's true." Nothing reveals more about the changing attitudes of the miners than their decision to take illegal action; "We were brought up to respect law enforcement. . . . I always thought of state troopers as [the] next thing to family . . . now they attack us," said Jim.

With recent defeats and near defeats under its belt, the labor movement is in real need of precisely the morale and energy that would spring from a full victory against Pittston. That victory could come, but it depends strongly on the solidarity of the labor movement. Thousands of union members, students, and others have visited "Camp Solidarity" to demonstrate and support the miners and to show Pittston that the story will travel far beyond the southwest tip of Virginia. Public figures, including Jesse Jackson and Lane Kirkland, have gone to show their support. More visitors will show Pittston and the State of Virginia that the UMWA is supported nationwide. The union also needs money; the strike fund does not cover legal costs or the huge fines imposed by the courts. For visit information, or to make a donation, contact Justice for Pittston Miners, UMWA District 28, P.O. Box 28, Castlewood, VA 24224. (703)762-5537.

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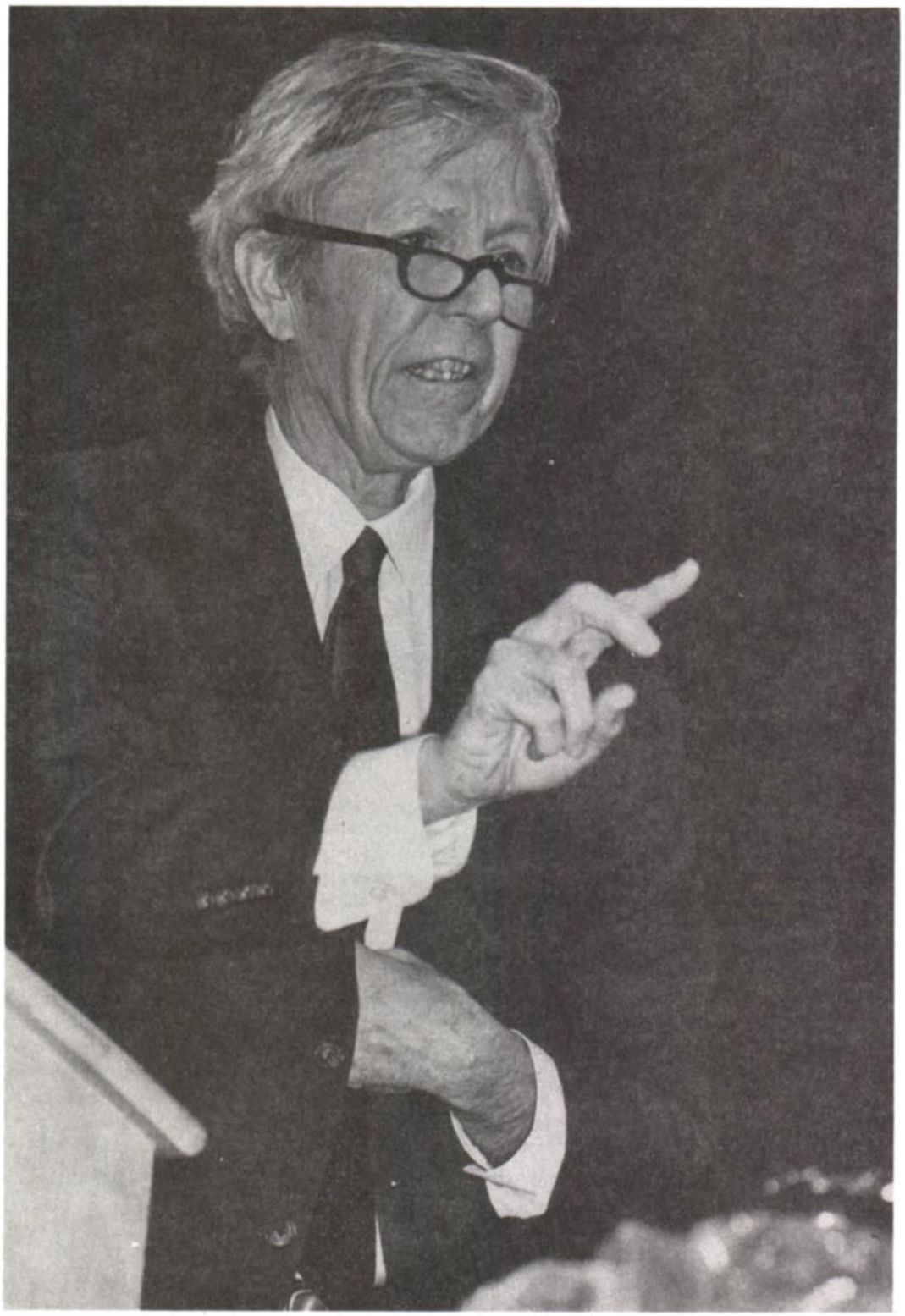

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Remembering Mike

Paul Berman

Where did he get the energy? Apart from his amazing productivity and range of activities, he even looked energetic, like a light bulb. Not having been among his personal friends, I have no intimate insight into this mystery. I observed him from a seat in the fifteenth row. But that was the ideal place for noticing what the energy managed to achieve.

We like to think that political principles are self-contained, that our world view stands on its own, that attractive and decent theories of political economy draw us forward and will draw others, too. Political ideas, though, if they have any merit, must show a human form. We want them to stand before us and radiate, like body heat or the light from someone's eye. We insist on this, whether we know it or not. If the spirit won't become flesh, it won't even be, in the end, spirit. I don't know how Harrington would have articulated this truth. But it was obvious from the way he behaved that he understood it perfectly.

Some of us who took to politics through Students for a Democratic Society and allied movements of the New Left did not enter into political adulthood as Harrington's admirers. On the contrary! Even those of us who would never criticize his anticommunism faulted him for what seemed, to our overradical eyes, an excessive Fabian moderation and an infuriating slowness to mobilize against the Vietnam War, which was indeed the one great blunder in his life. We were righteous; we banged our drum. But when we finished banging, we quietly filed into the auditorium along with everyone else, and we made no explanation of our change of heart, not even to ourselves, and when he got up to speak, we cheered as if we had counted ourselves Harringtonians all along.

Was this because he updated his ideas to include a few of ours? Because he convinced us of his own essential correctness? Of course it was—even if agreement never extended, as it never can, to every single issue or campaign. Politics, though, is more than program. We cheered because when Harrington walked to the podium, our own instincts about the democratization of society, the stupidity of present inequalities, the need for controlling wealth, the central role of labor and of feminism, the wisdom of ecology, the ideal of an economy based on workers' control—these, our several political reasons for being, became more than principles. They lived and breathed. They beamed. They took on traits that pertain to character, but not necessarily to politics: honor, honesty, tolerance, humor, sagacity, culture. They were a man. The political leader who advocated American socialism managed also to embody it. That was his genius.

Joanne Barkan

I first encountered Michael in 1976 when he spoke at Wesleyan University. The audience was peppered with people like myself who wanted, more than anything else, not to be "social democrats." Unable, or unwilling, to comprehend his politics, we badgered Michael with hostile questions.

Years passed before I understood how deeply radical Michael was, and by then I was working closely with him in DSA. By then, I understood not only how thoroughgoing a transformation of capitalism he always demanded, but also how his concept of the transformation evolved in response to a changing world. That energetic mind was never closed. I saw Michael incorporate feminism in an ever more substantial way, and, in the last few years, environmentalism. When he changed, he did

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so seriously, within the context of his closely held beliefs.

Shaping a *democratic* politics that binds visionary goals and socialist values to immediate struggles was Michael's great contribution. But he did more than shape an entire politics. He inspired people to live that politics. He combined passionate conviction with such obvious human decency and good sense. Like most DSA activists, I felt heartened whenever I heard him speak. His life itself—that resolute commitment untainted by dogmatism—became an inspiration.

In the years after I heard Michael speak at Wesleyan, I lost my left romanticism. The socialist project looked more and more difficult, and I came to depend on Michael's optimism—an intelligent optimism. If I obsessed in political debates about the imperatives of capital accumulation as a barrier to radical change, I expected Michael to counter not so much with a ready solution to the problem I posed but with a coherent politics, a stance in life. And that he did.

When the news came last June that there was nothing more the doctors could do, the grief welled up along with a sense of emptiness, abandonment. I found myself saying I felt leaderless—and then I was embarrassed by that feeling. Didn't I belong to the political generation and gender that distrusted leaders, especially men? But Michael had given us another gift—he taught us to work democratically with a strong leader. I think outsiders would have been surprised at the degree to which Michael submitted to the guidance, will, opinions, and nagging of DSA committees and staff. He argued and listened with equal intensity; he worked with us as peers; he returned the respect and affection we felt for him—but perhaps with an even greater measure of compassion. How grateful I am to have known him, and how much I will always miss him.

David Bromwich

Michael Harrington had two qualities of the greatly good—patience, and an almost total freedom from vanity. A political worker by calling, he was also, irrepressibly, a quick-witted man, who could startle himself (in the middle of some careful analysis of historical trends) with a sly joke or a glancing allusion. He must often have been bored, or tired; yet one cannot imagine him looking bored, and the tiredness rarely showed in public. To have confessed to feelings of discouragement must have seemed to him a sin against hope. Was there ever anyone who wasted less time? "A sense of humor saves a few steps, it saves years", and Michael had a sense of humor—with a long or short fuse, as needed. Once, after a lecture, I heard him argue with an ultra-pure nut—another Irishman, a Jesuit-turned-communist and an engaging fellow, but half crazed with conspiracies. "Where are your people? Where are the troops? That's what I want to know," said Harrington. Sanity fought that battle to a friendly draw. But he never gave up on an enemy, or even a temporarily forlorn ally. Talking to a group of friends in the early seventies, he spoke undogmatically of "my disagreement with Pat Moynihan and others who think they can have the best effect by working in a Republican administration." Nobody else in the group would have put it so kindly. But then, nobody else predicted that Moynihan would come back as a liberal, and a steady one at that. It was one of Michael Harrington's unwritten rules to leave everyone—and his country, too—plenty of room for the lucky turn, the generous second thought.

He was a good writer, but a great speaker, and it is hard not to connect his matter-of-fact charity with his way of talking to a large audience. There are two schools of thought on how to win a debate. You can undercut your opponent, in the belief that, as he grows weaker, you will grow proportionately stronger. Or you can state an alternative view so candidly, with so firm an appeal to the self-respect of your listeners, that the other side simply seems to have wandered into the wrong conversation. Most good or effective public speakers belong to the first school. Michael belonged to the second. In debate, in writing, in the whole conduct of political life, he showed the continuous strength of heart that sometimes comes from being "proud up to the point of equality." It was only the outward sign of a natural and undistractable feeling for justice. When I think of him now, he is standing typically with a cluster of people, listening or earnestly talking and then looking up if a new one joins, to see what you will have to say. For his look was always alive and inquisitive, his voice incapable of patronizing, just as it was incapable of false deference: he was a democratic person to the bottom of his soul. How few like him are left on the scene—as if our prospects had grown smaller all at once. And yet,

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saying so, one can imagine him looking up, and shrugging off the dramatic cast of this remark, and saying something different. How many have there ever been? In America, for all who have known him and known his example, Michael Harrington is another name for hope.

Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

I first came to really know Mike Harrington in 1976 on a lecture tour in India arranged by the USIA for International Women's Year. My tour included a small conference on "Social Diversity, Economic Inequality and Political Integration" at a remote place called Gupalpur-on-sea on the south coast. Waiting before 6:00 A.M. in the Calcutta airport, I saw a man who towered over the other passengers; unbelievably it was Michael Harrington, who was also scheduled to attend.

The conference was small, situated in a remote hotel. The talk was intense. It was attended by a handful of Indians and American Fulbright scholars, mostly political scientists with a radical past who seemed to have been deeply affected by their year in India. The Indian scholars seemed to move effortlessly between a dispassionate social scientific approach to the problems we were addressing (such as whether the road to modernization should follow the Chinese model, and what the consequences would be for democracy of the "emergency" declared by Indira Gandhi just before we came) and thought that they characterized as a "higher consciousness." Many of the Americans found the leap to spirituality engaging. Mike and I banded with the very few whom we regarded as consistently reasoned, objective as to the facts, and oriented toward *this* world.

"This world" attention meant not only the problems of people of lower castes but, to the surprise of some, the plight of Indian women as well. We had learned of the developing concerns regarding dowry murders of young brides and the disparity in literacy between men and women. The Indians were surprised to hear Mike talk about issues of feminism in India and the United States. The few Indian women at the conference were particularly impressed with the sympathetic concern and interest of this American man. Unlike most of their colleagues, he didn't pay lip service to egalitarian principles but talked about real solutions; and he listened to them.

Mike was also fun to be with. Pursued by the betal nut "wallah" on our organized trips around the vicinity of the hotel, he had everyone thinking of new constructions: he came up with the "functional theory wallahs," "the utilitarian economist wallahs," and the "love wallahs."

And, his thoughtfulness was impressive. When he learned that Indians in Oressa were not permitted to buy whiskey, he went out of his way to provide some for them. When my connection out of Bubaneswar was canceled he volunteered to wait several hours with me, rescheduling his own travel plans to be sure that I was not stranded. Forced to use a rickshaw, he was solicitous of the driver, getting off at every incline, and paying him the equivalent of a day's salary.

I have many other memories of Mike in India. Many of his experiences are recorded in *The Vast Majority*. The time in India was only a moment, but a moment made special by Mike's insights, humor and compassion.

Jeremy Larner

In 1955 Mike came up to Brandeis to confer with the ten members of the progressive political club. There was plenty of left-minded political passion on the campus, but few saw hope for active politics in those Eisenhower years. Mike brought us more optimistic news. Speaking with a tremendous flow of energy, information, and analysis, he told us his travels had convinced him that a coalition of farmers and workers was about to rise again and dominate the 1956 elections. Coming from Indiana, where these same signs had eluded me, I had my doubts. Perhaps I was young and snotty enough to think that the nuts and bolts of organizing were more boring than the lofty historical theories that passed about me day and night. Still, I was aware I was in the presence of an exemplary person. It didn't matter

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that the left didn't rise as he (or anyone) hoped; what inspired us was that a guy like Mike was devoting his life to it. Mike's vision was, and remained, the most humane and practical version of the American dream I knew of. If others had worked as hard and passionately, it might have come true.

While Mike stuck to his democratic ideals, the theories with which he backed them changed over the years—a better way, I came to learn, than those who do it the other way round. That day, as he talked to us, he returned again and again to the gut-level facts of poverty and injustice—never with malice or hate, but with joy for what might be and for the fellowship of doing it. Eventually, he was able to move—if not change—the country by making poverty visible. Even in 1955, his blue eyes were watery and pale—in odd contrast to the intensity of his speech—and I thought he looked tired, that he was mobilizing his energy against a continual drain.

I remember in the campaign of 1968, when I was writing speeches for Gene McCarthy, I sometimes called Mike to find out what should be known and said. Since Mike was supporting Bobby Kennedy, I imagine the Kennedy speechwriters made the same connection more frequently. Socialism, then and now, was a word that could not be mentioned in American politics—yet how many politicians must have turned to America's leading socialist, simply because he knew what the problems were, he ceaselessly thought about what might be done, and one could trust him absolutely.

Maxine Phillips

Everyone remembers the first time he or she heard Michael Harrington speak. Mine was sometime in the early seventies in a drab room at the Catholic Worker house on the Lower East Side. I didn't know Mike's history with the Worker and was surprised that someone so famous would spend a Friday evening speaking to a small group made up primarily of derelicts and elderly leftists. The lapsed Catholic friend who had invited me started hearing the Voice of God in the middle of the speech. The whole scene was very uncomfortable, except that as Mike spoke I was caught up in the common sense of his message and his uncommon description of socialism. Like many others, I would join the democratic socialist movement in large part because he was so convincing, so credible, so charismatic.

Later, as a staff member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and Democratic Socialists of America, I regularly saw people respond to him with that same excitement. This was a man whose work had changed people's lives: not only poor people's, but *our* lives. By then, for me, the edge was off the excitement. Years of arranging agenda items for endless meetings, of juggling creditors, of internal wrangling gave me respect for Mike's considerable organizational skills but dulled my ability to see land at the edge of the swamp. Then he would step up to the podium and the fire would flare. No matter how tired he was, no matter how dismal the external or internal political situation, he could call forth the best in us, holding out a vision of the new world. He always cautioned that socialism was not a religion, which is true. But he preached it with such fervor and made so many "altar calls" that one could get confused. As "chair of the Catholic Atheist Caucus" he might wince at the following description, but his life illustrated the biblical passage that those who "wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint." The strength finally gave out. The work and the legacy remain.

Jo-Ann Mort

The last time I saw Mike, we had lunch at a coffee shop in Greenwich Village. He had a chocolate milkshake, which had been his staple food since the cancer recurred. We discussed nineteenth-century literature and E. M. Forster, the possibilities for lasting romantic love in the world, and Mike's ideas for a new book he planned to write. He told me he had a long version and a short version in mind, depending on how much time he had left. He was dead two and a half months later.

"Thinking changing and changing living," Auden wrote. I wanted to talk to him about practical details,

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too—what we in DSA should do without him, assure him that somehow the organization would survive. But the subject never came up. Michael believed in me more than I believe in myself. As he believed in others scattered around this country. A circle of comrades I have come to know through Mike, the DSA generation, is a generation solely by virtue of our allowing Michael to transform our lives. Lives he changed forever; we, who are now beholden to a possibly utopian, but absorbing, imperious notion of building a democratic socialist movement in this country—a notion that Michael handed us as his legacy.

Jeffrey Scheuer

I didn't know Michael Harrington personally, but in the public man I felt I had a special and elegant friend. First and last, I admired the lucid power and moral clarity of his prose, a legacy that will endure beyond memory. Everywhere in Harrington's corpus there is decency, reason, and hope. But for inspiration, I will remember his public voice: thin but resonant, with a distinctive charged cadence and a faint Missouri twang; urgent, hortatory, always appealing to the best, it was the voice of one of America's most compelling orators. It expressed a searching but confident and courageous vision, always focused on humane values and human problems. That vision was Michael Harrington's gift to democratic socialism and to American discourse. To be a socialist, he once said, is to be an optimist; he made it easier to be both. □

Photo by Dan Miller

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Jeff Faux

A NEO-CALVINIST TRAPPED IN REAGANOMICS

DAY OF RECKONING, by Benjamin Friedman. New York: Random House, 1988. 323 pp. $19.95.

The polls tell us that worship of laissez-faire is on the wane. Collapsing bridges, the Savings and Loan swindles, rising homelessness, the antics of Leona Helmsley and Ivan Boesky have begun to sour Americans on the exaltation of greed as the guiding inspiration of public policy. Republican strategists—who don't get out of bed without taking a poll—have been on to this for awhile, as was demonstrated by George Bush's campaign for a kinder, gentler "education Presidency." Recently, his OMB director, Richard Darman, one of the architects of Reaganomics, has been speaking out, with a straight face, against selfishness. Even the Heritage Foundation is suddenly worried about the thirty-seven million Americans without health insurance. Had it not been for the most inept political campaign in memory, this shift in public mood would probably have put a Democrat in the White House.

But if the power of right-wing ideology is receding, Ronald Reagan's works still cast a long shadow over the American political economy. His achievements in the conservative cause were many: obvious examples include an upward shift in the distribution of income and wealth, a decimated civilian public sector, the return to respectability of labor-bashing, and the abandonment of vital economic sectors to an invasion of subsidized imports and a feeding frenzy of domestic speculation and fraud. But his master stroke was the engineering of a large fiscal deficit, a political scorched-earth policy that denied his enemies the resources to capitalize on a liberal swing in the political pendulum after he was gone. Moreover, the fiscal deficit has so befuddled the Democratic party intelligentsia that the extent to which one is regarded as a deep thinker in Washington-Cambridge policy circles these days depends on how much one is willing to reduce the incomes of the Democratic party's own constituencies in order to pay for Ronald Reagan's debts. Not a bad performance for a man regarded by both left and right intellectuals as a nincompoop.

Of course, the political burden of the deficit cuts both ways. It has already denied Reagan's Republican heir the ability to capitalize on the extraordinary events in Eastern Europe. George Bush had the opportunity of a cold-war lifetime to make Poland an economic satellite of the West, but he couldn't come up with the money. Neither does he have the money for a war on drugs. There will be more such embarrassing moments before this president completes his term. But domestic politics is the bottom line. Despite ritualistic denunciation of the deficit, Republicans have been in no hurry to make sacrifices to eliminate the deficit. They have the Democrats where they want them.

Ronald Reagan himself may or may not have seen the trap he laid for the Democrats (I suspect he did), but Stockman, Kemp, Roth, and the rest of his gang saw it. As many of them have since admitted, they knew at the beginning that the Laffer Curve rationale for Reaganomics—lower taxes would spur people to work harder, stimulate faster economic growth, and return enough to the treasury to balance the budget—was an illusion. If by some miracle it worked, fine. But if it didn't, it would starve the welfare state by cutting off the supply of revenues. For the right, it was win/win.

The Democrats took the bait. Pressured by the need to raise campaign funds, they snapped at the chance to become the party of Fiscal Responsibility in the mistaken belief that they could capture a Chamber of Commerce constituency. Even the boldest and most prescient of Republican strategists

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could not have guessed how completely their opponents would fall for it. Nor could they have imagined how much help they would get from the increasingly conservative pool of think-tank pundits and professors from whom the Democrats draw their policy expertise. One result of this Democratic neo-Calvinism was Walter Mondale's disastrous demand for higher taxes in the campaign of 1984. Another was the absurd campaign of 1988 in which Michael Dukakis, declining to make populist promises for fear of jeopardizing his bogus credentials as a budget balancer, let his liberalism be defined as being soft on murderers.

Democrats in Congress, lured into the trap by Reagan's indifference to the deficit, tripped over the wire strung out by Gramm and Rudman and are now face down in the budget deficit mud. It's a Catch-22: In order to find the money for new programs, they must cut the deficit; in order to cut the deficit, they must raise taxes or cut programs; since Bush is opposed to a tax increase, cutting programs is inevitable. Indeed, the likely outcome of the budget deal is higher taxes and less services for the lower- and middle-class Democratic constituency, for which Bush will blame the Democrats. As Robert Kuttner has pointed out, the traditional Democratic formula of "tax-spend-elect" has been altered to "tax-tax-tax."

But partisan politics aside, aren't the Democrats in fact trying to do the right thing? Regardless of who set the deficit on fire in the first place, doesn't someone have to take responsibility for putting it out? And if the Republicans won't do it, don't the Democrats have to?

There is a fair amount of moral consolation to this line of reasoning. The Democrats appear to be on the principled high ground, concerned with the future of the nation, while the Republicans simply win elections by pandering to the demand of the populace for instant economic gratification. Indeed, America's economic elite seems to have an inexhaustible supply of moral indignation against deficit spending that infuses newspaper editorials, the business press (whose readers overwhelmingly vote Republican), statements of high-level commissions, and the papers and books of present, past, and future advisers to Democratic candidates. Like the Calvinism of old, this neo-Calvinism's effect is to divert attention from the distribution of income and wealth in the here-and-now to obsession with a distant future punishment for a collective financial sin.

It is appropriate therefore that the most definitive statement of economic neo-Calvinism, *Day of Reckoning*, by economist Benjamin Friedman of Harvard, is full of Old Testament denunciations of borrowing and debt that would inspire the burgher congregation of a seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed Church. Friedman's book has been endorsed by just about everyone in the mainstream of the economics profession, and the fact that it is so highly regarded reveals how extensive is the triumph of Ronald Reagan. If Friedman were an *agent provocateur* (he is not) sent by the Republican National Committee to inflict confusion in Democratic ranks, this is exactly the book that he would write.

Much of Friedman's book is a criticism of Reaganomics. Somewhat overwritten, it shows in competent detail how, by lowering taxes without lowering total spending, Reagan's program generated the largest peacetime fiscal deficit in history. Savings rates, which were supposed to rise in response to lower taxes, fell, and the share of personal income devoted to spending for immediate consumption rose. Friedman explains:

> With our available savings more than halved by the federal deficit, but our investment needs certainly no less than before, businesses and individuals have had to fight harder than ever for what savings has been left. *Real* interest rates—i.e. interest rates compared to prospective inflation—have therefore remained historically high despite our easier monetary policy since mid-1982.

High U.S. interest rates drew in money from Europe and Japan, thereby making up for the drop in U.S. savings. Because we don't sell securities in yen or marks, however, this meant that foreigners first had to buy U.S. dollars. The result was a rise in the value of the dollar, which made imported goods cheaper and our exports more expensive. Imports therefore rose faster than exports, leading to the huge merchandise trade deficit, which had to be paid for by further borrowing or by selling off U.S. assets to foreign investors.

The "Day of Reckoning" will come one of two ways: either the interest charges on our growing debt will become so onerous that our children will be forced into poverty similar to that now being forced on Third World debtor nations, or foreigners will begin to perceive investing in the U.S. economy to be more risky business, demanding higher and higher interest rates as compensation for the risk, until rates get so high as to precipitate a massive recession possibly dragging the rest of the world down with us into another Great Depression.

Given the potential descent into economic hell postulated by Friedman, it follows that reducing the deficit (to the tune of $100 billion dollars per year) is the most important task confronting us. His last

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chapter is called "Hard Choices," a campaign favorite of the dour Dukakis. In it, he tells us that we must cut programs and raise taxes, particularly the latter. Friedman thinks that "the single best way to raise the revenue we need would probably be a tax on spending for personal consumption."

Friedman personally would like to see all this done in a progressive humane way. But progressive or regressive, it must be done. If we are to be saved from the fire and brimstone of a flight from the dollar, sacrifices must be made.

With much of Friedman's analysis, there can be little dispute. The deficit *is* a problem. It has helped raise interest rates, aggravated our trade imbalance, and caused an uncomfortable reliance on foreign investment. But does it justify a politically hopeless politics of austerity, condemning Democrats to offering up the slaughter of their own innocents to save the nation?

The answer is no—on several counts.

First, the notion that America is on a consumption binge is simply not supported by the facts. Friedman seems to arrive at this conclusion by allowing his flights of moral fancy to run away with his analysis. We start with a reasonable criticism of Reaganomics, but before long the spirit of the biblical prophets he quotes at the beginning of each chapter begins to dominate the argument. Excessive military spending and tax cuts to the rich fade before a vision of modern Sodom and Gomorrah in which all Americans are condemned to the flames. In chapter 1, it is Reagan who has fallen from grace; by chapter 11, the rest of us are called upon to pay financial atonement for his Original Sin.

Friedman himself tells us earlier in the book that "between 1979 and 1987, the after-inflation gain in per capita consumer spending was just 1.8 percent per annum, even less than the 1.9 percent during 1973–79. Recessions aside, it is not clear that there has been any improvement in the 1980s at all, even from the limited perspective of growth in consumption."

Thus, it turns out that the much cited growth in personal consumption spending as a share of production (GNP) in the 1980s was primarily a result of a drop in the rate of growth of production. And, again as Friedman admits, it was consumer spending that fueled the recovery and has since kept the nation from sliding back into a recession.

Given these acknowledged facts, how does Friedman arrive at his "overconsumption" thesis? Much of the answer is that Friedman, like other neo-Calvinists, is a little slipshod with the word "consumption." The word changes meaning halfway through the discussion. When identifying the *causes* of our problem, military spending is considered consumption, that is, spending for other than business investment. Therefore, by definition, consumption has accelerated. But when it comes to *solutions* for excessive "consumption," he demands that America end not its militarism but its alleged hedonism and, therefore, cut living standards.

Given the stagnation of incomes over the last decade, the most sensible explanation of our low savings rate is not a consumption binge but the incomes squeeze on working Americans that has forced them to spend a larger proportion of their income in order to pay the mortgage, feed the kids, and rent videotapes. The problem has not been a lack of savings but a lack of income.

To be sure, *some* Americans are consuming at obscene levels. The extravaganzas of Malcolm Forbes and Saul Steinberg, as well as others slightly less rich and famous, in the face of increasing poverty and suffering certainly are worthy of a few Jeremiads. But this is largely a function of the dramatic upward shift in income. In the 1980s, the real incomes of the bottom 60 percent of the population fell and that of the next 20 percent was stagnant. Only the incomes of the top 20 percent rose, and most of that rise was concentrated in the top 5 percent. Over the same period, income from assets, which goes primarily to the rich, rose three times as fast as income from working. Americans aren't overconsuming; the rich Americans are, because they are receiving too much income. The significance of this point for economic policy seems to be lost on Professor Friedman.

The same discontinuity between the analysis of the causes of our problem and the neo-Calvinist solution is revealed in Friedman's seemingly objective listing of the options for spending cuts. Again, the "hard choices": we can cut entitlements (primarily Social Security, Medicare), military spending, or nondefense programs. Friedman hands us the sword with which we must make the Solomon-like decision. But the choice is rigged by an absence of context. Since 1980 entitlements spending has remained roughly stable as a percent of all federal spending. Other civilian spending—for education, health, transportation, research and development, housing, the environment, and so on—fell from 27 to 17 percent. Military spending rose from 23 to 27 percent. Again, given the undeniable waste and corruption in the military sector, it is curious that our moral zealot, Professor Friedman, suddenly becomes a relativist and slips out of making the hard choice.

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He does not, however, shrink from proposals that would reduce incomes of average Americans further, either by raising taxes or by slowing economic growth, or both. The theory is that this will raise the savings rate. But experience suggests that it could have the opposite effect of reducing savings as families spend still larger shares of dwindling incomes in order to maintain their living standards. Indeed, everything that we have learned about economics in the past fifty years tells us that savings is a function of higher income growth. Long ago, Keynes observed the "paradox of thrift"—as people try to save a higher proportion of their income, the reduction in demand (sales) decreases economic activity and eventually their own incomes. Savings rise when people spend and invest. Even the last years of "supply-side" policies has verified this observation.

In this sense, mainstream economics has become quite reactionary, building on pre-Keynesian notions that simply assume away the problem of maintaining sufficient purchasing power. In Friedman's world, the question of maintaining demand is peripheral, just as it was to the economists who advised both Herbert Hoover and FDR that balancing the budget was the answer to the oncoming depression. Friedman covers himself on this with a paragraph urging surplus nations—Germany and Japan—to keep their markets open and their consumers buying. He also tells us that he expects the Federal Reserve to do its duty and lower interest rates while the budget deficit is being lowered. But he is clearly willing to risk recession today—with the attendant danger that the overhang of consumer and business debt will make it a long and deep one—in order to achieve his goal of running a budget surplus to avoid a flight from the dollar at some time in the future.

Another problem with Friedman's formulation is that at least some of the damage to the U.S. economy that he and other neo-Calvinists attribute to the fiscal deficit was clearly a result of other factors as well. For example, the tight-money policy of Paul Volcker was a major cause of high interest rates. And the notion that the trade deficit is solely a result of the high dollar sparked by the deficit is belied by contradictory evidence—such as the fact that the U.S. dollar peaked against the yen in 1982 before the big run up in the U.S. deficit with Japan. Indeed, when pushed, a number of analysts who are generally allied with the neo-Calvinists will admit that the fiscal deficit at best is responsible for less than half of the trade imbalance with the rest of the world.

Friedman also—like most of the neo-Calvinists—exaggerates the size of the deficit. As economist Robert Eisner has pointed out, state and local government surpluses should be subtracted from the federal deficit to get an accurate picture of its impact on the economy. A second subtraction could reasonably be made for inflation, which over time reduces the real value of the federal debt. Finally, those parts of the federal budget that represent investments with long-term payout—bridges, buildings, and so on—should be only partially included in the current budget, as is the accounting custom in the private sector. The neo-Calvinists claim that, on the contrary, the present budget deficit is understated because it is calculated after netting out the debt sold to various agencies of the U.S. government—principally the Social Security Trust Fund. But, as Robert Heilbroner and Peter Bernstein note in their excellent little book, *The Debt and the Deficit,* the debt the U.S. government owes to itself does not carry the same burden as the debt it owes to outsiders.

In my view, Eisner and Heilbroner and Bernstein are a little too cavalier about the international dimensions of the deficit and our consequent dependence on foreign financing. But one does not have to agree with Heilbroner and Bernstein that the real deficit in 1988 was practically zero to accept their larger point that the deficit does not nearly represent as big a threat to U.S. stability as the neo-Calvinists would have us believe.

Indeed, obsession with the deficit could well be more of a threat than the deficit itself, especially when it prevents us from investing in the future. As the original Calvinists discovered, borrowing money is no sin. People, businesses, and governments properly go into debt to finance productive investments that will generate more income in the future. The real problem is that borrowing in the 1980s was thrown away on a wasteful binge of military spending and tax giveaways to the rich. As a result, we have a "Third Deficit" in public investment for education, public infrastructure, research and development, and so on, that by the most conservative measures comes to at least $100 billion. It would be preferable to raise the money needed for such investments by taking it from those sectors of the economy that have benefited from the Reagan deficits—the military and the rich. But the future will not wait. It will be better served by making these investments—even if it means *increasing* the deficit—than by another year of letting a million kids drop out of school, another year of falling

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behind the rest of the world in civilian research and development, another year of delay in improving water systems and cleaning the air.

Deficits by themselves tell us nothing about the future path of the economy. During World War II, we ran huge deficits and at its end, our national debt was larger than our GNP (today the debt is about 43 percent of GNP). But the U.S. position in the world's marketplace was dominant, and the next decades saw the longest economic boom in our history. It was our competitiveness in the world that fueled our postwar success; our debt was incidental. By focusing so hard on our financial position and not at all on the problem of making products competitive and regaining markets in which we can sell them, Friedman and the neo-Calvinists are missing the point.

Yes, the deficit is a problem. One can imagine a flight from the dollar creating a financial panic because of our dependence on foreign financing. But one can also imagine economic disasters stemming from causes other than the budget deficit—for example, a crash coming from continued excessive speculation in finance and real estate, a continued loss of industrial markets, a failure to increase the number of skilled workers to compensate for the coming shrinkage in labor-force growth, the growing cost of health and environmental protection, a global depression brought about by world incomes falling behind the expansion of capacity.

But addressing these sorts of questions poses a problem for the mainstream of the economics profession. Solutions point to much more government intervention than most are comfortable with. At the end of World War II, U.S. dominance over the world's markets fostered the illusion that American economic policy could be limited to macroeconomics: overall fiscal and monetary policies and the question of how to foster the production of goods and services that can be sold competitively was left to the private sector. It worked for thirty-five years. But now the forces of world competition have broken through the self-contained American economy, flooding it with the products of mercantilist nations where governmental policies target shares of the U.S. market. Because U.S. industrial and trade policies are still beyond the ideological pale, the best that mainstream liberal economics has to offer is wage austerity in the guise of moral rectitude.

Neo-Calvinism obviously has its attractions for the Democrats as well as for their gurus. It gets them good notices in *New York Times* editorials, citations in *Business Week*, and invitations to preach to corporate congregations. They love it at the Kennedy School. But it's not going to get America out of its economic doldrums, and it's not going to get the Democrats back into the White House. For that they will need a touch of the old-time religion: using government to expand the economic pie and to cut bigger slices for the 60 to 80 percent of Americans who are losing ground in the economic race or are afraid they soon will. Until the Democrats once again are willing to risk some economic heresy, they will remain trapped in the choir of Ronald Reagan's church. □

Paul Berman

JOHN UPDIKE'S TRANSPARENT EYEBALL

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: MEMOIRS BY JOHN UPDIKE. New York: Knopf, 1989. 257 pp. $18.95.

A chapter from John Updike's *Self-Consciousness* ran some months ago in *Commentary* under the provocative title, "On Not Being a Dove." Updike looked back at the loneliness that overtook him during the high tide of antiwar indignation in the sixties and seventies, when he, one man against the mob, remained a supporter of American policy in Vietnam. He recalled inanities of the antiwar movement. He savored a Weather Underground vow to oppose "everything that is good and decent in honky America"; and having in that manner given the left and the peaceniks their say, he took out his trunk of still-beloved prowar arguments and unfolded each aging but intact debater's point and held it up for admiration.

Communists, he recalled, were not to be applauded, which was true enough. The South Vietnamese village officials were going to suffer if communism won. America had to be tough. "It was all very well for civilized little countries like Sweden and Canada to tut-tut in the shade of our nuclear umbrella and welcome our deserters and draft evaders, but the United States had nobody to hide behind. Credibility must be maintained. Power is a dirty business, but whoever said it wasn't?" And so forth through the litany that everyone in honky and nonhonky America remembers from twenty years ago and that most people finally rejected, though not so quickly as to prevent the deaths in Vietnam of additional hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians.

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"On Not Being a Dove," viewed in the pages of *Commentary* with the too-speedy glance that magazines induce, almost seemed an ordinary conservative political memoir, rendered more than ordinary by Updike's elegant style. In his own pages, though, surrounded by the five other chapters of *Self-Consciousness,* the memoir acquires quirky unexpected complications. Second thoughts and self-contradictions, sometimes only half-acknowledged, crop up. The author virtually concedes, *sotto voce,* that trying to justify the war was a doomed business, and deserved to be. "Those butterfingered Washington fat cats in their three-hundred-dollar suits had dropped us all into a mess of blood and shame and frustration and embarrassment, and here I was, stuck with defending them."

The argument against American intervention that ultimately proved more popular than Weather hostility to honky decency—the simple contention that we had no reason to be in Vietnam—seems to him, when he ever-so-briefly stops to mention it, "unexceptionable." Reasonably enough, given these several reservations and regrets, his own fervor for the war turns out to have been so feeble that never once did he lift a finger, as far as can be judged, on the war's behalf, apart from making himself unpopular among friends and family. When someone asked him to write a statement about the war, Updike's hawkish declaration nearly hid behind a hedge of qualifiers. Called on to vote every four years, the man who horrified friend and foe by rolling Nixonian phrases around his tongue—credibility must be maintained, power is a dirty business—marched straightaway to the polling booth and pulled the ancestral Democratic lever for Hubert Humphrey, the non-Nixon, in 1968 and for George McGovern, the anti-Nixon, in 1972.

Why persist, then, as he did, in supporting American involvement in the mess of blood and shame? The motives that he recalls began with class wars of eastern Pennsylvania, where he grew up during the Great Depression and learned to nurse populist resentments against the coal-owning elite. Possibly his resentments contained a touch of socialism, too, since he mentions twice, by way of demonstrating the class consciousness of the region, that nearby Reading, Pa., had a Socialist mayor in those days. When the author left home and attended Harvard and met his colleagues at the *New Yorker* and took to arguing the prowar line at literary parties on Martha's Vineyard, he somehow saw the liberal and radical intellectuals as yet another elite, and he stuck by his lower-class loyalties in the form of defending Lyndon Johnson, whose schoolteacher background reminded him of his own hardworking, long-suffering father. He was, in short, a loyal son of the masses.

Or so he maintains, since it may be that, when it comes to telling the upper class from the lower, Updike's Pennsylvania resentments have left him inadequately prepared. In judging himself, he seems to discount his Harvard education and his three-hundred-year Dutch-descended American ancestry; and in judging his opponents in debates among the left-wing intellectuals, he seems to overlook the inconvenient reality that some people may have grown up in immigrant neighborhoods poorer and more socialistic than his own. He is a man who gazes downward, wagging a finger at his social inferiors, while believing himself to be gazing upward, shaking a fist at the haughty elite. Updike in his confusion is not a charming sight. The class analysis in "On Not Being a Dove" seems almost calculated to irritate. Plus there is the problem that social resentments, even if portrayed with pinpoint accuracy, look petty and cheap against the backdrop of the Vietnam War. What if antiwar arguments *did* carry a hidden message of snobbish superiority over the unsophisticated, law-abiding hicks of the lower class? How would that shine a better light on American participation in Indochinese events?

Updike's purpose, though, is self-examination, which is not the same as examination of the war—or at any rate his purpose turns to self-examination whenever dovish rejoinders threaten to overwhelm his well-loved hawkish beliefs. Having evoked his class resentments, he plunges deeper into his own motivation by descending from the sociological to the religious. His Lutheranism was, he tells us, Pennsylvania Dutch in origin, meaning German, and taught him the German habit of obedience to authority, which was still another reason for rallying to the war's defense. And from Christian doctrine he descends to the personal. His first wife was a Unitarian minister's daughter, and the Unitarians were relentlessly liberal and antiwar and upper class, which was irritating no end to the *New Yorker* writer from Harvard who pictured himself as a man of the masses from coal country. Peevishness, in a word, drove him to his desperate views.

And if that weren't enough to set the ordinary reader on edge, Updike chivalrously refrains from telling us much that is derogatory about his first wife, except that she was "smooth-pelted" and Unitarian, which may seem less than damning—while regaling us with scabrous tales about himself, the bad husband, whose pelt was, furthermore, vulnerable to scaly outbreaks of psoriasis. He masturbated another woman in the backseat of a traveling car while his put-upon minister's-daughter-

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of-a-wife had to sit in the front, not noticing. And as if that, too, were not enough, he finally descends, at the chapter's conclusion, from the peevish to the periodontal. He compares hardships that he endured in a dentist's chair with the hardships endured by soldiers in Vietnam. No! He goes too far. But yes, having been left without proper dental care as a child during World War II because of the exodus of dentists into the armed forces, he figures that he, too, though psoriasis kept him out of the service, has nonetheless served his country through years of toothy pain in adult life. Therefore he claims every right to require that others serve their country, too, namely by risking death in foolish imperial ventures in Vietnam.

At this point, the reader who hasn't already flung *Self-Consciousness* across the room will notice that John Updike's "On Not Being a Dove," though bearing a political title and a publishing history that began at *Commentary*, is not a political memoir at all and is indeed calculated to irritate and is, in fact, a hair shirt. It is a Shiite whip across the author's own naked, scaly back. It is a public self-mortification. Those painful dental problems drag him to the operating chair of a violent dentist who pounds heartily at his jaw until the author finds himself thinking, *"Hit me again!,"* which are precisely the words that might have served as subtitle to "On Not Being a Dove," except that in the author's figurings, a phrase like "On Not Being a Dove" doubtless already communicated the same implicit plea.

Why is it, on the other hand, that of all crosses a body must bear, those constructed by dentists are the least ennobling? The village hawk and cad who rails against peace protesters while sprawled across the dentist's chair does have a pretty good idea of how ridiculous he looks. "On Not Being a Dove" has its quota of humor. The chapter is also lush with serpentine sentences and brilliant images, so that you find yourself wondering, as often happens in reading Updike, whether to frolic in the richness of the prose and wit or to bother yourself with trying to decipher the underlying message. He raises the question himself by citing, in still another of his self-lacerations, an early reviewer who complained that prose by Updike was beautiful, but the man had nothing to say—though nothing to say might, in the case of "On Not Being a Dove," strike some readers as an improvement.

My own view is that, with Updike, the surface style counts for more than the depth, though by that I mean nothing pejorative. Updike writes in a specific tradition, or at least he has written *Self-Consciousness* in such a tradition. A kind of shingle hangs at the front of the book, consisting of epigrams from Ralph Waldo Emerson and other sources, which, studied with sufficient care, explains all. *Self-Consciousness* is a transcendentalist text. The melodic perfect prose is not, after all, a freak of talent, like a radio announcer's mellifluous voice or an actor's handsome face, unconnected to larger gifts. Beautiful prose is a consequence, not a given. Good Emersonian that he is, Updike notices in every fresh detail of the visible world new evidence of the splendors of the universe and the oneness of all things. He is astir with what he sees: the air sparkles, the molecules beam with light. He writes with spectacular precision because he sees that way. Metaphors tumble from his lips because unexpected links between wildly different things are always leaping to his attention, in token of the universal One. Finally the crystalline neatness of his observations and the interconnectedness that he everywhere detects give way, in proper transcendental fashion, to bursts of ecstasy. "Happy almost to tears" is his phrase. He writes eloquently because he is at a peak of emotion.

Transcendentalism is a quasi-mystical idea, but it is not generally speaking a warm one. The authentic Emersonian gazes at surfaces, therefore upward at the sky and the stars, which are cold, not downward and inward, which are warm. Emerson, as his friends used to complain, was a cold fish, which he readily admitted. But the admission counted for little because chilliness is not, in transcendental eyes, the worst of sins. Falseness, not frigidity, is the single abomination. On the same grounds, transcendentalism doesn't necessarily lend itself to community-minded good cheer. Fidelity to self, not to others, is the single road to truth. Curmudgeonhood is saintly.

Updike means to invoke that idea in "On Not Being a Dove." Twenty years ago he entertained notions about the war, his theories about credibility and power and the village officials of South Vietnam and so forth, which influenced him; but he wants us to know that most of all he supported the war because his authentic self—peevish, petty, resentful, obedient, wanton, like all selves, say what you will—called on him to do so. The issues that mattered to other people, the moral and political concerns, were not necessarily any business of his. Faithfulness to his own roots was all that counted. Emerson in certain moods was the same way. The sage of Concord would have no part of political movements like abolitionism and temperance, not because he disagreed, necessarily (Emerson favored

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the first, had no opinion of the second), but because his business was his own self, not anyone else's.

What is the self that requires such strict fidelity, then? Emerson's self was, like anyone's, in certain respects empty of moral concerns and not less true in being so; but in other respects, social morality filled him to bursting. Transcendental vision was, for him, the latest of mankind's steps toward oneness with the universe, the steps that, as main currents in American Protestantism had always understood, advanced from Moses to Jesus to Luther to Cromwell to Washington—and beyond. Emerson the egoist curmudgeon could scoff at people who got hot and bothered over paltry affairs like abolitionism; but Emerson the grand product of Protestant radicalism was not a paltry man, and he got over his scoffing, and as soon as the issue turned serious, he never doubted what was proper, and he enrolled in the abolitionist ranks, and in the ranks of American Indian supporters, and of many a commendable cause. It was *false* political allegiances that he objected to, allegiances that arose from political or personal hysterias or ambitions or from showing off or from social pressure. *True* political allegiances, the ones that participated in humanity's long progress toward perfection, were faithful reflections of his own self.

Updike is more of a conventional Protestant than Emerson, since he continues to attend Sunday services and maintains, in proper Congregationalist or Episcopalian manner (he mentions these two churches), that God is both one and three, which is not the same as maintaining, with Emerson, that God is everything. But Updike has no use for the old-fashioned pulpit radicalism of historical progress. It's not that he lacks a historical imagination. On the contrary, his sense of the American past is so keen as to be autobiographical. The self-consciousness of Updike's title is historical consciousness, too. Great chunks of American history, the Dutch colonization of New York and New Jersey, the German immigration, the political traditions of Jacksonian Democracy, which Updike's grandfather still upheld when the author was young and which affected him far more than did the remote socialism of industrial Reading—these bits from the past figure, in his self-examination, as pieces of his own personality.

But none of this has to do with moral evolution, or progress toward perfection or the Emersonian oversoul, or the Protestant march from Moses to Washington and beyond. History is history, and metaphysics are metaphysics, in Updike's eyes. In which case, what is it that he believes, ultimately? What do the threeness of God and the oneness of the universe, his Lutheran and transcendentalist concepts, signify to him? If transcendental and Christian ideas have no meaning that unfolds over time, if they only have effects, like marijuana, good for merry moments and minor consolations, why take them seriously? Why be so damned faithful to the self, if the self has no larger historical and moral value? What is there about curmudgeonhood, in Updike's case, to make it divine?

Perhaps there is nothing, which may be why Updike's fidelity to self seems to have let him avoid the agonies of conscience that so many others went through in regard to the Vietnam War. He has suffered continuously throughout his life: his skin sends him trekking to distant beaches in search of pain-relieving sunlight; his gums rebel; his tongue stutters; pain afflicts him; he is awake to his flaws as father and husband. But he doesn't suffer for the world. He is in this respect Emerson's opposite. Emerson regarded himself as a reasonably good man, by and large; his gravest worries were reserved for his country and the times. Updike, at least in certain moods, is fairly appalled at his own behavior, but he is not much concerned over others. He loses no sleep over what his country may be up and doing.

The five remaining chapters in *Self-Consciousness* discuss the author's psoriasis, his stuttering, his childhood, his grandchildren (who are half West African, which occasions some thoughtful observations on race prejudice), plus intimations of his own mortality. Not everything in the book observes the same high standards of composition. His grandchildren seem to embarrass him or for some other reason stiffen his fluid tone. Meditations on his mother's aging and on his own turn halting and abrupt, as if he meant to forecast a future loss of powers. Yet *Self-Consciousness,* taken as a whole, testifies to the one transcendental strength that I can imagine matters to Updike more than all the others, namely, the ease with which transcendental perceptiveness lends itself to literature. The self that emerges from *Self-Consciousness* may display, from a perspective like mine, all sorts of deplorable traits. There is a quality that seems to me amoral; where he should be full, he is empty; where I would prefer a Socialist, he is a Jacksonian; where I would prefer an Emersonian, he is a Lutheran. I won't vote for him! But what a writer he is. His virtues are the flood of images, the metaphors that leap from stone to stone, the vividness, the elation, finally the fidelity to self—even if his is a self that, for reasons of its own, instead of mobilizing him for radical causes, sends him wandering down to the village green to put his stubborn, sinful head in the stocks for all of us louts and boors to mock at and despise. □

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Rose Coser

FEMINISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

WOMEN ANALYZE WOMEN: IN FRANCE, ENGLAND, AND THE UNITED STATES, by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne J. Serrano. New York: New York University Press, 1988.

THE BONDS OF LOVE: PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF DOMINATION, by Jessica Benjamin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

Reconciling psychoanalytic theory with feminism is no easy task. These two books come to the rescue. In the first, Baruch and Serrano present us with interviews with women analysts from France, Britain, and the United States, who not only tell how they use psychoanalytic theory in their analyses of women but also how they adapt psychoanalysis to a feminist orientation. At the same time, the interviews reveal some national differences in psychoanalytic thought and intellectual orientation.

The authors chose nine women from France, four from Britain, and five from the United States, most of them therapists. The exceptions are the literary critic Diana Trilling and Dorothy Dinnerstein, a professor of psychology and author of *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*.

All respondents are followers of psychoanalysis in that they accept theories of the unconscious and the psychoanalytic meaning of symbolism. They all amend psychoanalytic theory and criticize one or another of Freud's ideas, but they do so in individual ways. Each of them is also like certain others: the French will be French, Anglo-Saxons will be Anglo-Saxons.

Anglo-Saxon thought usually has empirical reference. British and American respondents give examples, usually from their cases, and in their theories refer to experiences with patients. The French, by contrast, develop their theories in the abstract, hardly mentioning experiences with patients, and if reference there is, it is to myths or to the Bible. Most are followers of Lacan (although they have broken with him individually, at different times), who deliberately favored theory over clinical work. One of the French analysts, Joyce McDougall—who came from New Zealand and was trained in London—is an exception. Not only is her theory grounded in the real world (and please don't ask "what is real?") but her references are to the social world. She believes, for example, that the oedipal organization refers to the structure of law and order.

As different as these analysts are, they have much in common. Whether they call themselves feminists or not, they all reject Freud's psychology of women, first of all the concept of penis envy. As Hanna Segal puts it, "I think Freud's theory that little girls think they have got the penis and then discover they don't is bunko. On the other hand, Freud was the first to treat women as human beings . . . he gave a proper place to female sexuality. . . . And even more important, psychoanalysis is the first organized profession in which from the beginning women were treated exactly the same as men."

There is a general tendency toward theoretical gender equalization. "The girl would like a penis like her father. Why not? Little boys are also envious of the mother's role and her power to attract the father and make babies with him" (Joyce McDougall). "When [children] discover the biological sex differences, each sex wants what the other has" (Donna Bassin). Françoise Petitot recognizes the social factor in gender differences: "It is primarily language that creates the difference."

Gender equalization requires, of course, a revision of oedipal theory. "Freud's reductionist view of the Oedipus legend treats only patricide and incest. He doesn't treat the two matricides, those of the Sphinx and Jocasta" (Monique Schneider). But these analysts spell out gender differences as well as similarities. Joyce McDougall, for example, who believes that "perhaps the men of tomorrow may reconcile tender and erotic feelings better than the old generation," believes that women "are afraid of being abandoned, of losing their lovers. Men, on the other hand, are frantic about getting trapped into a situation from which they cannot escape, as terrified of this as women are of losing their security."

The fact that these analysts refrain from developing a common notion about gender similarities or differences is certainly to their credit. Nonetheless, it is hard to accept the inconsistency in the thoughts of Chassequet-Smirgel. She states, "The man and the woman are essentially bisexual at the psychological level, for each of them identifies with the two parents and not only with the parent of the same sex," and she recognizes that "there isn't a complete separation of the sexes." But then she disapproves of the sharing of parenting: "The father is close to his baby. A total confusion of roles—the father who gives the child something to eat, who stays at home, the mother who goes to work. . . . I wonder if this is really positive." And a little later: "It seems to me indispensable for the mental health of a child that there be a difference between father and mother."

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Compare this with Hanna Segal, who believes that when two parents "share the child-rearing tasks, I don't believe they're identical"; the children "turn to mother and father for different things."

What is most striking in the interviews with French psychoanalysts is their conception of the infant's pre-oedipal stage. Here we encounter talk of the "archaic mother," the "phallic mother," the "devouring mother," the "all-powerful mother." Monique Schneider says, "I think that the primitive mother brings death to the extent that she denies or renders useless visions of mastery, of conquest with which men want to identify. That is, she breaks, she destroys the image, she doesn't kill man; she kills an image that he wants to have of himself." It is not clear whether perhaps Schneider doesn't mean to say that this destructive mother is the result of a patriarchal system, for she adds that "all possible dangers are put on her side in order to make the function of the father essential, so that the mother is the danger and the father the redeemer." And elsewhere she says: "The woman is enclosed in her kitchen as if in a prison. It seems to me that all the language of culture favors a woman who is at the same time enclosed and enclosing."

But this raises another question. Even if the destructive mother is seen as part of a misogynist culture, why attach negative labels to the underdog? The image of the underdog was once the opposite: those who fought for the rights of the working class had a tendency to idealize the image of the Worker. It was not enough to see prostitution as part of the pathology of the class system, there was a whole literature—not necessarily of the highest order—that extolled the human virtues of prostitutes. During the years when the rights of mental patients were suddenly discovered, in the fifties, they were considered the purest, and their therapists were often seen as akin to brutal jailers (and some of them were). Those enlightened liberals would not consider the possibility that underdogs and victims are just like everybody else—good, bad, and indifferent. It was difficult for liberals to admit that some workers can be authoritarian, that some prostitutes are immoral and selfish, and that some mental patients are nasty, aggressive, and obnoxious. But with women and mothers this train of thought is being turned around. Yes, we say, the circumstances are terrible, women are being exploited and dominated, and hence they are archaic, primitive, destructive, domineering, what have you.

Mother-bashing is fashionable in this country as well; but the negative image that was prevalent in psychology and psychiatry and that was propagated with such labels as the "overprotective mother," the "domineering mother," the "schizophrenegenic mother," has been pretty much given up by now by the more enlightened representatives of the professions—in part because in the United States one doesn't stay very long with the same theories, in part because it has been recognized by the more sophisticated intellectuals that these are clichés, in part because—I like to think mainly because—the women's movement has had its influence in uprooting sexist images. It is to be hoped that recognition of the misogynist nature of such images will become more widespread here and will soon cross the Atlantic.

The contradictions in the French analysts' image of the mother have their parallel in the fact that they are ambivalent about calling themselves feminists. They are of the "I-am-not-a-feminist-but" variety. The "but" is important because they usually make what I consider feminist statements. Even Luce Irigary, whom I would consider the most radical feminist of all, says, "I don't particularly care for the term *feminism*." Yet she goes on to propose a general strike of women: "We would no longer do the housework, we would no longer have children, we would no longer make love, nor would we go to the factory any more. But it's not in the factory that we are most trapped—it is in the reproductive function." If this isn't feminist, what is?

Of special interest in this book is the interview with Jessica Benjamin. I am singling her out not only for this reason, but because of her recent book, *The Bonds of Love*. Her judgment is unequivocal: "For me, feminism is a revolutionary and wonderful idea that we are seldom able to grasp in its entirety." She continues: "The attempt to grasp it in its entirety is probably even dangerous. . . . For example, feminism as a great idea can become filled up with the content that only women are the bearers of some historical truths, just as people once thought that the proletariat was the bearer of the struggle for a just society." She criticizes theories that single out mothers as bearing the responsibility for neurotic child development: "Psychoanalysis is always talking about what's good for the infant; but what about the mother's needs?" She speaks about the idealization of the father in existing theories: "The problem that we're trying to understand is either why the father is idealized the way he is, or why the mother is feared in the way she is."

In her book, Benjamin uses feminist theory to analyze the psychology of domination and submission. She integrates into the psychoanalytic framework the concept of *recognition*, by which she means empathy or identification with the other. For her, the basis for human development as well as for human togetherness and equality is mutual recogni-

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tion, that is, affective mutuality, the sharing of states of mind. It is not just that every individual, beginning in infancy, is subject to the influence of others and has to be understood in relation to the environment; for Benjamin, subject and object are engaged in interaction. The child's development is not just one of gradual separation from the mother, but consists in learning how to "recognize others; the issue is not how we become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other."

Benjamin sees a basic tension between the assertion of self and recognition of the other, between a claim for independence and dependency on or attachment to the other. There is not a linear development "from oneness to separateness"; there is a balance between them. During the oedipal stage of development, the father becomes the symbol of separation and of denial of dependency. He represents the principle of freedom and independence. In true Hegelian tradition (Benjamin was trained in the Frankfurt School), she sees in the ideal of freedom, paradoxically, the seeds of domination. The son, after rebelling against paternal authority, may well want to reproduce it; the son will become the father, denying freedom and equality to others. When the tension between dependency and independence becomes intolerable, the individual either gives up dependency and becomes dominant, or gives up independence. The one who is dominant no longer recognizes the other. The one who is dominated is hungry for recognition and therefore accepts submission as a means for achieving it, yet remains insatiable, and continues the pattern in the face of frustrations, humiliations, and pain.

It should be clear that Benjamin departs from traditional psychoanalytic thought, where the desire for power is rooted in castration anxiety and in the aggressive instinct. Benjamin develops a new theory of sadomasochism: both in exercising power and in submitting to it, each partner strives for recognition, but who will become object and who will become subject is socially patterned, whether in the relation between master and slave or in the relation between man and woman. In her interview she makes it clear that she does not mean to imply that dominance and submission are always differentiated by gender, only that our society and culture exercise pressure for a predominance of such gender differentiation.

Benjamin's theorizing is a fine attempt to integrate feminist and psychoanalytic theories and in this way to contribute to the advancement of psychoanalysis itself. At the same time she integrates psychological and sociological analysis to deal with the cultural polarity of gender. Not only do parents shape their children's identity in accordance with the culture, but cultural patterns of polarity are being transmitted to young individuals directly. This pattern is one in which there is a "gendered discourse," in which instrumental orientation and impersonality are considered masculine, separated from moral and emotional experience, which is considered feminine. "The symbolic structure of gender polarity produces the fantastic ideal of motherhood even as it stimulates the fear of destroying all maternal goodness. On the social level, male rationality sabotages maternal recognition, while on the psychic level the oedipal repudiation of the mother splits her into the debased and the idealized objects." As a sociologist, a psychoanalyst, and a disciple of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin calls for a change in social organization and for a recognition of men and women as equal subjects.

Benjamin's theory, together with Baruch and Serrano's volume of interviews, covers a wide span of dissenting psychoanalytic thought. The introduction to *Women Analyze Women* is a clear exposition of these trends. And it is more: an astute commentary on the contributions and foibles of the analysts presented in this book.

Benjamin's notion of interaction in her own book is useful for understanding the character of the interviews in *Women Analyze Women*. The richness of these interviews comes, at least in part, from their not being merely responses to questions but being dialogues in which ideas emerge from the interaction between interviewer and respondent. This adds to the intellectually gratifying reading. □

Michael Kazin

The Unions and the Church

IN TRANSIT: THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION IN NEW YORK CITY, 1933–1966, by Joshua B. Freeman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 434 pp. $34.95.

WORKING-CLASS AMERICANISM: THE POLITICS OF LABOR IN A TEXTILE CITY, 1914–1960, by Gary Gerstle. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 345 pp. $39.50.

At a time when the industrial unions launched during the Great Depression are struggling with the symptoms of what may be an irreversible decline, labor scholars are producing works of originality and

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insight about the 1930s and 1940s—a more sanguine, though not completely triumphant, era.

This ironic concurrence is not hard to explain. Most contemporary historians of the CIO are former New Leftists, old enough to appreciate the pain of political eclipse but too young to have been partisans in the events they now interpret. They are, moreover, skillful riders on that long wave of innovative scholarship in social and cultural history that, over the past quarter century, has completely transformed our understanding of how American working people thought and acted.

The result is a cluster of local and regional studies that explains, really for the first time, how little-known leaders and anonymous rank-and-file members carried out the changes usually identified with celebrated worthies like John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman. These new histories don't ignore sit-down strikes, the deeds of national union officials, and factional divisions. But they place such traditional topics in a richer context, where they become familiar if dramatic background scenery in which a more fundamental play of ethnic, workplace, gender, and ideological allegiances occurred. As David Brody remarked several years ago, the steady erosion of the manufacturing economy and of the unions that grew up in the age of mass production enables scholars on the left to separate the CIO as it actually was from the ideal instrument of working-class uplift they would have preferred. "The past can [now] be understood on its own terms," wrote Brody, "a lost world to be recaptured in the historian's imagination." [*Dissent*, Fall 1985]

Joshua Freeman's *In Transit* and Gary Gerstle's *Working-class Americanism* are among the best examples of what the marriage of political commitment and scholarly detachment can create.* Each carefully details—with the aid of oral history—the growth of a union in an important industry in a single city. Both reveal how Catholic immigrant cultures helped to shape and then alter the political complexion of the new unions. And both portray the organized left in a respectful yet sober fashion. Communists and socialists dominated the leadership of these locals, but their radicalism was always tethered by the exigencies of union-building and the need to neutralize enemies inside and outside the ranks of labor who were ever alert to "un-American" influences.

In fact, Gerstle argues that the forging of a patriotic identity was central to what industrial workers achieved in the 1930s and 1940s. At first glance, his chosen locale would not seem the most likely place for a battle over Americanism. Woonsocket, Rhode Island, was a city of 50,000 residents, two-thirds of whom were French-Canadians who had begun to emigrate to the United States at the turn of the century to find work in woolen and cotton mills owned, in many cases, by their countrymen and a handful of French investors. Gerstle describes the insular environment of a community dedicated to the survival of Québecois values and religion. French was commonly spoken, and, until the Great Depression, the biggest political campaign was waged against a 1922 state law requiring parochial schools to teach most subjects in English.

In the 1920s, despite these assertions of ethnic autonomy, Woonsocket textile workers were also beginning to enjoy the fruits of an "American standard of living" and realizing how their political and cultural isolation prevented them from rising further. When the Great Depression devastated the textile industry, they were prepared, Gerstle argues, to welcome a union drive if it did not challenge traditions they held dear *and* if it articulated ideals they held in common with most other Americans.

The organization that accomplished this dual mission was the Independent Textile Union (ITU). The ITU was established by a small group of French-speaking Belgian craft workers whose own views had been formed in the anticlerical, socialist milieu of the Belgian Labor party. But they appealed to the rank and file by portraying the union as the bearer of consensual American traditions of "independence" and "democracy." The ITU organ compared hostile employers to King George III and

* Other recent works include those of Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) and his forthcoming biography of Walter Reuther; Peter Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–39: A Study in Class and Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Steve Fraser, "From the 'New Unionism' to the New Deal," *Labor History* 25 (Summer 1984): 405–30 and his forthcoming biography of Sidney Hillman; Ronald Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at GE and Westinghouse, 1923–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900–1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Ronald Edsforth, *Class Conflict and Cultural Consensus: The Making of a Mass Consumer Society in Flint, Michigan* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

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urged members to emulate the Pilgrims and the "wise, hardy and staunch" pioneers in covered wagons who took risks to attain prosperity for their families. It avoided references to the church or the faith.

This species of Americanism was, of course, ubiquitous during the years of the Popular Front. But Gerstle is the first historian to devote an intricate narrative to showing what a flexible and fickle language it was, available for the purposes of corporatist Catholics and secular radicals alike. The original ITU leaders sought to equate patriotism with "industrial democracy," an ongoing struggle to widen the scope of workers' control within the limits of capitalism. By the end of World War II, however, a growing antileft opposition was telling workers that to "be American," they should eschew all forms of prejudice, including class hostility. Of this approach, Gerstle writes, "Adherence to the American creed of the equality of all men would lead capital and labor, as it would Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Gentiles, whites and blacks, to respect each other, mend their differences and live harmoniously." By melding church doctrine with the new civil religion of cultural pluralism, priests and other French-Canadian conservatives ousted the radicals and took over the union.

New York City transit workers, according to Joshua Freeman's fascinating study, faced a similar conflict between radical union leaders and their devoutly Catholic critics. Running the subways, buses, and trolleys was, for decades, a job done mostly by Irish-Americans. Before the 1930s, several craft unions had tried to organize these workers, who routinely labored through a seventy-hour week. But the combination of a bewildering variety of jobs—from ticket agent to roofer to shop mechanic—and sophisticated union-busting by the IRT and BMT, then privately owned subway lines, defeated all organizing attempts.

It took an unusual alliance in 1934 between Communists and left-wing veterans of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to solve the problem. Transit workers in the CP, then at the end of its ultrarevolutionary Third Period, brought a tenacious commitment to organizing this key industry in America's largest city. The IRA men, most of whom had emigrated to the United States after the end of the Irish civil war in the mid-twenties, brought a well-deserved reputation for toughness and extensive contacts with a Hibernian workforce that was wary of outsiders. The very name of the new body—the Transport Workers Union (TWU)—had an Irish provenance, resembling that of a republican institution once led by Jim Larkin and the martyred James Connolly.

In its campaign to win and hold the support of thousands of transit workers, the TWU continued to mix elements from Irish tradition and Leninist strategy. Neighborhood picket lines and enforced silence were used to shame individuals who broke a strike or refused to pay their dues. Union socials always featured Irish bands, and Mike Quill—who later became the TWU's authoritarian leader—first rose to prominence as the bon vivant MC of dances sponsored by Hibernian associations. Meanwhile, a band of CP cadre (to which Quill belonged, although he may never have formally joined the party) directed union affairs, bobbing this way and weaving that to take advantage of any openings provided by the companies and the administration of Fiorello LaGuardia (which was gradually moving to exert municipal control over the entire system).

Not surprisingly, a number of New York Irishmen were not happy with such a formidable left-wing presence. During the late 1930s, priests at a Jesuit labor school who were admirers of Father Charles Coughlin tried to topple the TWU leadership with anticommunist invective and charges that Quill and his allies were allowing a speedup on the subways. Since unskilled Irish workers were among the most faithful listeners to Coughlin's broadcasts, the right-wing Jesuits made some converts. At the same time, the liberal Association of Catholic Trade Unionists (ACTU) was actively defending TWU members who had been disciplined for opposing union policy.

Although these forces did not attain their goal, they probably did convince the men who ran the TWU to show more deference to the church and to voice increasing irritation at policy directives from CP headquarters that clashed with the views and interests of transit workers. According to Freeman, during World War II Mike Quill began to display his piety in a sincere effort "to bathe in the glory of both Rome and Moscow." This charismatic leader did not break with the CP until 1948, but the ideological tensions had been building for years before. In the final analysis (as Marxists used to say), the ancestral faith of Ireland proved more durable than the gospel of William Z. Foster and Joseph Stalin.

Freeman's book provides far more than a nuanced account of ethno-political conflict within the union. He gives a clear explanation of the tangled and always contentious process by which the New York transit system was unified under municipal author-

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ity. Contrary to his prolabor reputation, Mayor LaGuardia constantly tried to limit the rights and benefits of TWU members. Freeman also narrates the TWU's active involvement in the sizable left wing of city politics (Quill himself was, for a time, an American Labor party councilman from the Bronx). And he traces the union's expansion into other regions of the country where, in the late 1940s, it established organized labor's first foothold on passenger airlines. The book is a feast of telling details. Freeman seems to know, for example, precisely how many workers at which New York transit facilities donned TWU buttons and when. Both he and Gerstle deliver microhistory at its best without neglecting the larger questions.

For today's left, the most important of these is why contemporary industrial unions have not fulfilled the promise of their heroic origins. The shifting demands of the imperious economy obviously narrowed the possibilities: by the mid-1950s, most Woonsocket textile firms had either gone out of business or left the high wages and ethnic enclaves of New England. The town, in Gerstle's phrase, "had become little more than an industrial junkyard." Meanwhile, CIO unions held their own, in part, by learning to operate within a postwar structure that rewarded playing by the new rules, albeit ones that organized labor had helped create. In New York, Mike Quill routinely insisted that the Transit Authority grant a long list of exorbitant demands while, in private, he was negotiating agreements that required higher productivity from his members.

Beyond such factors, both Gerstle and Freeman suggest that to lament what the CIO might have been is to suffer from historical myopia. The 1930s upsurge of the people Mary Heaton Vorse called "labor's new millions" occurred amid a uniquely favorable set of cultural and political changes: Immigrant workers began to regard themselves and demand to be treated as authentic Americans; the popularity of the New Deal cleared space for the emergence of a labor-based Democratic party in scores of industrial towns and cities; and a new consensus favored democratic rights for wage earners and a limited welfare state. These were significant advances that require no apologies or second thoughts. But, by the 1960s, they no longer could motivate a new generation of working Americans. For unions to revive in the 1990s, they will have to discover, again, the subversive potential of working-class cultures—among both native-born Americans and the new immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Then, perhaps, life on the job will again enter the realm of urgent politics rather than remaining simply a subject for individual grumbling about conditions that seem impossible to change. □

James Green

A PRACTICAL VISIONARY

TALKIN' SOCIALISM: J. A. WAYLAND AND THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN AMERICAN RADICALISM 1890–1912, by Elliott Shore. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988. xi +280 pp. $25.00.

Few problems have troubled U.S. historians more than the question Werner Sombart posed in 1900: "Why is there no socialism in America?" Of course he asked the question just as America's only grass-roots socialist movement was aborning. One answer is that there *was* socialism in America, but that the movement suffered from the carrot of Wilsonian progressivism and the repressive stick wielded by the same administration during and after World War I.

Still, the decline of socialism after 1920 and the failure of the left in the 1930s kept the question alive. For a time Daniel Bell's end-of-ideology interpretation dominated the discussion. Socialists were sectarians living "in the world but not of it" and espousing class-conscious politics in a society without class conflict.

In recent years historians have shifted away from explaining the failure of socialism. The Sombart question is based on the assumption that a class-conscious labor movement actually created socialism in Europe. The United States is therefore "exceptional" in not spawning anything comparable. Even if we accept the assumption of a strong socialist presence in Europe, and ignore its ultimate political impact, we can easily reject the view that we are a society without class. If class conflict indeed existed in the United States, then some kind of class consciousness was expressed in politics, though not necessarily in the form of European socialism.

Historians are now exploring the oppositional politics that actually existed in the United States. Following the late Herbert Gutman, historians like Alan Dawley, Leon Fink, Paul Faler, and Sean Wilentz see in the nineteenth-century worker protest a class-conscious anticapitalism they call labor republicanism. Mari Jo Buhle, Meredith Tax, and Susan Levine see in the Gilded-Age struggles of

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working women the emergence of a class-conscious protofeminism. Lawrence Goodwyn sees populism as a mass radical movement premised on an awareness of class exploitation by big business and banks. Because it was so democratic, Goodwyn argues, Populism was more radical in challenging capitalism than European-style socialism. David Montgomery has identified an American form of syndicalism among skilled workers who belonged to conservative AFL "pure and simple" unions. The struggle for control on the shop floor yielded sharp antimanagement feelings and bonds of mutuality, but socialist politicians failed to see the radical potential of the craftsmen's ideology.

This work challenges assumptions about American exceptionalism. Still, the identification of surrogate socialisms does not explain why the Socialist party of America failed to become a mass movement.

Broadly, the answers to Sombart's question have fallen into two camps: political answers that focus on the problems of the left itself and conditional answers that focus on the problems posed by American society and polity. There is no need to review these interpretations here; they have been capably summarized by Irving Howe in the first chapter of *Socialism and America*.

Neither variety of explanation has been satisfactory. The conditional explanations are full of holes. Clearly, violent class conflict affected the United States; the problem was that it did not usually get politicized by the left. Surely, most immigrants were culturally conservative and often politically deferential, but the strongest pockets of socialism developed among Irish shoeworkers, British and Finnish miners, and Jewish clothing workers.

The political arguments about the Socialists' internal problems are often marred by wishful thinking. To blame the Debsian Socialists for being too sectarian, too moderate, too nativist and racist, too vulnerable to government repression during World War I or too reliant on electoral politics implies that the Socialists could and should have acted differently. These counterfactual arguments are often the essence of Marxist historical controversy, but they do not deepen our understanding.

In my study of southwestern Socialists, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, I examined what the movement actually accomplished and paid less attention to the question of why it failed. Far from being sectarian, the Debsian Socialists in Oklahoma (the party's strongest state) included dissidents ranging from Pentecostals and Populists to Wobblies and Spiritualists. They worked very effectively within the largest trade union in the region, the United Mine Workers of America. The party's land program for tenant farmers was popular enough to risk cooptation by progressive Democrats. But the popularity of the democratic land-use program actually strengthened the movement by giving its leaders and demands legitimacy.

The southwestern Socialists were nativist and racist, but even the few, like Gene Debs and Oscar Ameringer, who rose above some prejudices and appealed to Native Americans, Chicanos, and African Americans, met with little response from oppressed nationalities.

Most southwestern Socialists certainly made themselves vulnerable to repression by opposing World War I. But it is not clear that joining Wilson's prowar progressives would have allowed the movement to prosper and grow in the 1920s. Organized labor, whose leaders supported the war effort and opposed the Russian Revolution, was still repressed in the postwar era.

Historians' preoccupation with how external conditions and internal problems inhibited the party's growth has discouraged other kinds of inquiry about what socialism actually meant to the American people. Exceptions can be found in Nick Salvatore's influential biography of Eugene Debs, which is also a cultural history of the movement, and Paul Buhle's recent *Marxism in America*. They both focus on the cultural appeal of socialism. And to Salvatore, the party's leader embodied that appeal: "Debs came to understand the complex character of the democratic tradition and publicly fought to define America's cultural symbols anew in the changed context wrought by industrial capitalism."

Debs was in the political world and of it. "His life was a profound refutation of the belief that critical dissent is somehow un-American or unpatriotic," says Salvatore. He is interested in how the Socialists spoke to people and how people understood what they said about the class nature of society and the promise of democracy. The appeal of Debs's party lay in its leaders' ability to explain social reality in radical political terms using commonly understood language.

This concern with the language of politics and the meaning of cultural messages also characterizes Elliott Shore's fascinating book, *Talkin' Socialism: J.A. Wayland and the Role of the Press in American Radicalism, 1890–1912*. Like Salvatore, Shore uses the biographical mode to explain the socialist appeal through the life of an influential figure, Julius A. Wayland, editor and publisher of the *Appeal to Reason*, the most successful radical publication in U.S. history.

Like Debs, Wayland developed his political views

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in the Midwest in the 1880s and 1890s and was influenced by populism, comunitarianism, and Marxism as well as Ruskin's eclectic romanticism. After the election of 1896 Wayland reluctantly gave up on the People's party and joined the Socialist Labor party. He soon fell out with SLP chief Daniel DeLeon, who called Wayland "a Salvation Army Sentimentalist."

At this point, J. A. Wayland had already become a successful newspaper publisher and entrepreneur. His first publishing venture began in Pueblo, Colorado, where he was radicalized by an English cobbler who hooked him with Laurence Gronlund's immensely influential attempt to Americanize Marxism, *The Cooperative Commonwealth*.

The publisher made significant profits through real estate sales and returned to his native Indiana on the eve of a great depression. Like his idol, John Ruskin, Wayland became a social critic and self-styled "One-Hoss Philosopher." In 1893 he began to publish his views in a newspaper, the *Coming Nation*.

Unlike DeLeon, Wayland was not a disciple of Marx. Instead he tried to Americanize Marxism so that it became "common sense" to ordinary people. Wayland saw socialism as a rational attempt to "control the forces that were threatening his America," in Shore's words. Socialists were defenders of Americanism

But of course Americanism also included some uncritical, traditional values. Indeed, Wayland "shared with many people the prejudices and ideas of mainstream American thinking." His anti-Catholicism was a throwback to colonial Protestant thought and the conspiratorial view of the Roman Papacy. Wayland, like all midwestern Socialists, found a radical meaning in Protestant millennialism. "The Coming Nation" would emerge and end the destructive effects of capitalism. The new nation would preserve the cultural values of small-town Protestant America. Immigration would be restricted. Blacks would "choose" to remain segregated and women could return to the home and hearth instead of being drafted into wage slavery.

After the collapse of the Populist movement, Wayland began publishing his "One-Hoss Philosophy" in the *Appeal to Reason*, which he moved to Girard, Kansas, in 1897. Within ten years Wayland had made the *Appeal* into a mass circulation radical weekly that played a major role in promoting socialist thinking in every state of the nation, though most of the readers were concentrated in the West and Midwest. In 1907 it serialized Upton Sinclair's best-selling novel *The Jungle*, brought Eugene Debs on as an editorialist, and played a major role in heightening the class resentment that resulted from the sensational kidnapping of William Haywood and other leaders of the Western Federation of Miners to stand trial for murdering the governor of Idaho. By 1910 the paper had achieved a circulation of 471,000, larger than that of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Wayland had a gift for writing "in the language of country newspaper paragraphs—humorous, biting, sentimental and uncompromising." For example: "Wheat is selling for 32 cents in Utah. Wheat gamblers live in palaces. One busts occasionally but the farmers do not move into his palace—another gambler does that." This kind of language accounted for a good deal of the *Appeal*'s popularity.

The *Appeal*'s growth is also explained in technological terms. Shore offers a fascinating account of the rise of mass circulation newspapers, aided by the falling price of newsprint and wood pulp paper and the change from steam to electrically powered printing presses. The advent of second class postage (one cent per pound!) and Rural Free Delivery made broader distribution possible. Higher priced advertising (pioneered by Joseph Pulitzer and purchased by new department stores and mail order houses) allowed greater capital investment by publishers. No less than capitalist publishers, Wayland understood how to take advantage of these developments.

Wayland drew other lessons from Hearst and the kings of the "yellow press." Circulation was the first priority, and "self-promotion to boost it was now the rule." The *Appeal* sponsored many subscription contests (a farm in Arkansas was once a first prize) and mobilized a remarkable "army" of salesmen-soldiers who fanned out and sold subs on horseback, bicycle, and along railroad lines.

Shore does not say enough about the *Appeal*'s role in movement building. He is more concerned with offering an interior view of the movement through his sketch of Wayland and his circle. The inner view of Girard and the activities in the *Appeal* building is not a very flattering one. Certainly, the "Little Ol' *Appeal*"—was something less than "The Temple of the Revolution." Like all radical cadres, the *Appeal* group displayed a "kind of tunnel vision," exaggerating its own concerns and successes while ignoring the larger changes in the society.

Shore also criticizes Wayland and Socialists in general for "dualistic thinking." They wanted to make a broad populist appeal to the middle and working classes but rejected the compromises the Populists made with the capitalist parties. They also clung to economic determinism even though it narrowed the party's class appeal to small property

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owners. They wanted to reach out to women and attempted to do so through a "woman's column," but their thinking about women's domestic status under socialism envisioned a world of separate spheres for men and women.

Finally, while Wayland envisioned a Cooperative Commonwealth free of capitalist greed and competition, he acted like a shrewd businessman. Shore believes there was a "stark contradiction" between socialism and the "get rich quick schemes" Wayland promoted. The publisher apparently thought he could separate his "personal economic life" from his political vision, says Shore. Wayland was probably not aware that his foray into consumer culture contradicted his socialist goals. Indeed, being a successful entrepreneur clearly allowed him to promote his socialist visions.

Here Shore departs from his exemplary attempt to describe the inner reality of Debsian socialism and enters the more familiar terrain of political criticism. Like most modern historians, he faults the socialists for not extending their radical criticism of corporate capitalism to other spheres of social life and for not understanding the diversions of consumer culture.

I am not so troubled about Wayland's shrewd business dealings or his marketing schemes. He showed how socialists could operate in the world they were trying to change. His ability to make money and invest it shrewdly in a "socialist making machine" showed that he could, contrary to Daniel Bell's view, live "in and of the world." More important, Wayland knew how to exploit the resources at hand and put them into movement-building.

Without suggesting his life as a model for our own time, J. A. Wayland's story offers some food for thought to contemporary socialists and anticapitalists, who often fear becoming creatures of the media but also complain about being ignored by it. Wayland and his *Appeal to Reason* comrades figured out how to acquire the capital and to exploit the latest technology and marketing innovations. They learned how to use new techniques of sensational journalism to reach a mass audience; they did so with homespun criticisms of capitalism—criticisms drawn very much from the common sense of rural and small-town people trying to save a threatened way of life.

Commonplace socialism is no longer very appealing to those who envision radical change. The Debsian idea of a "Coming Nation"—based on preserving the best about the past—ignores the need for an international, multicultural vision. But Wayland's story does show visionaries how radical ideas can be expressed in a familiar context and a commonplace language.

By looking at the language of radicalism and how it was printed, circulated, and read, *Talkin' Socialism* helps us understand what socialism really had to say. □

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An Author Protests

Editors:

Upon receiving my Summer 1989 issue of *Dissent,* I was dismayed to see that you had changed the title of my review of Arno Mayer's book without consulting me. My title—"The Holocaust as Byproduct?"—was meant to focus on what I believed to be the essence of Mayer's interpretation. I regret the titles you substituted—"Distorting the Holocaust" (on the cover) and "The Holocaust Distorted"—because I believe them too emotive and open to the unfortunate inference of an accusation of dishonesty. I would not have accepted them had I been consulted.

CHRISTOPHER R. BROWNING
Tacoma, Wash. □

Harrington

Editors:

The Socialists of India and the workers affiliated to Hind Mazdoor Sabha were shocked and grieved to know about the sad demise of our friend and colleague Mr. Michael Harrington, the socialist thinker and a friend of the downtrodden. Our organization, with a membership of three million, feels deeply hurt at this great loss to high idealism of the intellectuals and the fighting spirit of the working class.

My personal relationship with Michael began in 1958 when I first visited the United States and since then he always had a place in his heart for the poor of India. Though a citizen of USA, Michael belonged to the World and hundreds of papers and essays written by him stand a testimony to his sincerity, integrity, and devotion to the cause he loved most.

BRIJ MOHAN TOOFAN
Secretary, Hind Mazdoor Sabha
New Delhi, India □

On Chile

Editors:

Tina Rosenberg's "Will Democracy Come to Chile?" (*Dissent*, Summer 1989) helped me place Chile's problems in perspective against the larger Latin American background, but there were two flaws in this otherwise fine piece that I think should be corrected.

"When Allende became president in 1970, a socialist was elected to power in Latin America for the first time in history." Actually, the first was Jacobo Arbenz, elected in Guatemala in November 1950 and overthrown in 1954 in a coup much more blatantly supported by the CIA than the one that overthrew Allende.

Before Pinochet's rule, "Chile never had left-wing guerrilla groups." In fact, a Trotskyist group known as the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) engaged in significant guerrilla activity during Allende's period in office, and the MIR and the Maoist Revolutionary Communist party both did their best to undermine Allende's reformist government by eroding his support among radicalized peasants.

RICHARD WOODWARD
Locke Haven, Pa. □

On Marxism

Editors:

Thank you for the issue of *Dissent* (Summer 1989) containing the symposium on the current state of Anglophone political theory. Enjoyable as the essays were, I want to take issue here with part of David Plotke's essay on the relationship of Marxists to contemporary political theory.

First in defense of G.A. Cohen. He does indeed have views on politics, albeit at a relatively high level of abstraction, which, while they are not dealt with in his book on historical materialism, Plotke should have encountered in at least two of the other books which he discusses. Over the past decade the political morality of socialism has been the main focus of his work, and he has been engaged in the project which Plotke recommends to him, of "arguing with Dworkin and Rawls about relations among various equalities and between rights and conditions" for most of that time.

Plotke complains about the impossibility of reading off the politics of many current Marxist theorists from their substantive academic work. It is worth noting that this weakness, if it is a weakness, is one they share with many non-Marxist theorists. For example, the works of three major liberal theorists of justice, Dworkin, Rawls, and Joseph Raz, do not indicate what kind of concrete changes they think would be necessary in the real world in order for it to become a just world. But what is more important is that this failure to try to answer every single question is simply good and honest intellectual practice. Plotke's example of Przeworski's work on social democracy is very informative. From Przeworski's conclusions it follows that Western social democracy, for the first time in its history,

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no longer has a distinctive strategy and therefore is probably doomed as a political current. Nothing follows from this about what is the correct strategy for working-class movements in contemporary capitalism, and it would be intellectually dishonest to pretend that it did. What Plotke interprets as a "separation of Marxist theory from politics" is in fact simply a new modesty about what global conclusions can be honestly drawn from careful and detailed studies of more local problems.

HARRY BRIGHOUSE
Los Angeles, Calif.

DAVID PLOTKE REPLIES:

In virtually all variants of the Marxist tradition it was believed that there ought to be heavy traffic between theoretical arguments and the assessment of practical political choices. Thus it was usually possible to discern links between theoretical and political positions even if the relations were complex. The difficulty of identifying any such relation for a work such as Cohen's is a function neither of a wholesome theoretical modesty nor a corrupt integration into academia but of the limits of more-or-less orthodox Marxist categories with respect to contemporary political life. The faithfulness of the author of *Karl Marx's Theory of History* to his conception of the Marxist tradition suggests that if his analysis had generated major political insights modesty would not have kept the latter out of its pages. □

Whose Job to Teach What?

Editors:

After reviewing educational philosophies from Plato to Allan Bloom, Richard Rorty (*Dissent*, Spring 1989) settles down to complain: college professors who once served as free-wheeling social critics are now obliged to teach basic facts to "students who are already too old and too restless to put up with such a process."

The dubious implication is that somehow younger students are less restless than those at college and more compliant when it comes to assimilating facts. As a high school teacher, I can attest to a restlessness among the student body that surely must rival that reported by Rorty at institutions of higher learning.

Rorty suggests that the college problem arises from the failure of high schools to do their job. What secondary education needs, he says, is "lots of money and determination." Determination? Surely the high school teacher must possess uncommon determination if only through the necessity of having to face each day upwards of one hundred and fifty restless adolescents. Lots of money could bring real improvements through attracting able professionals to the field and reducing class sizes and teaching loads. Realistically, however, it is difficult to believe that lots of money will be forthcoming and, indeed, it is difficult to find a period in our history when public education was really flush.

Instead of bemoaning their fate, college educators should reconcile themselves to students arriving deficient in the basic understanding of history and culture. College teachers may find consolation in the fact that teaching basic history—unadorned by elegant criticism—has long been an important part of the college curriculum and as yet constitutes dignified and honest toil.

JAMES L. WUNSCH
New Rochelle, N.Y. □

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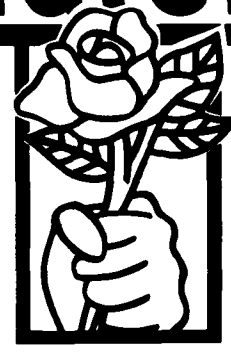
Author of THE OTHER AMERICA

SOCIALISM PAST & FUTURE



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